

# IMAGINATIVE WRITING

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# IMAGINATIVE WRITING

## AN ILLUSTRATED COURSE FOR STUDENTS

BY

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HUNTER COLLEGE OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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TO  
HELEN GRAY CONE  
*Long I followed happy guides*





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## PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to guide students in learning how to write. During twenty years, more or less, of experience, the teacher who writes the book has learned at least this: that the art of writing cannot be taught; it can only be learned. The part the teacher can play in this process is that of guide and adviser — collaborator, if need be. Accordingly the book has its center, not in the subject matter to be taught, but in the students to be reached. Its plan may sometimes seem not logical because it frankly aspires to be pedagogical. It presents not the results of investigations that have been conducted by the teacher, but problems to be solved by the students together with the teacher. It attempts a statement, not of all the information that can be gathered concerning description and narration, but of such material as is immediately helpful to the student in encouraging in him an interest in writing as a means of expressing what he has to communicate, in arousing in him a determination to write as well as he can, and in leading him in his efforts to master the technical difficulties of writing.

To achieve this purpose, teacher and students consult practiced craftsmen of the art. They do not ask these masters to discourse upon their methods; they study the finished handiwork as young painters study the canvases of their masters. They do this in a spirit of inquiry too humble to draw upon themselves the rebuke: "You would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass." They know that there is about the art of writing only a minimum that they can thus learn. That minimum it is their aim to learn; and the aim of a book like this is to help them to learn it by arranging the steps of their approach to the mystery, by assist-

ing them in their endeavor to gain from their acquaintance with the work of the masters all that is in it for them, and by leading them to apply to their own experience in their own way the methods they have seen the masters apply to their experience in their way.

ADELE BILDERSEE

NEW YORK,

*January 15, 1927.*

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# IMAGINATIVE WRITING

## CHAPTER I

### THE WAY TO LEARN TO WRITE

What is in the mind of the college student as he faces his instructor in a class in English composition? What especially is his attitude toward his task of writing? The teacher's desk is usually a barrier past which few candid expressions travel from students to faculty. Yet if the teacher has ears to hear he will have caught murmurs. An occasional student may have confided in him over a paper profusely marked with red or blue.

**An attainable art.** — These confidences often take the form of a despairing "I never *could* write. There's no use in my trying." Are there really people who never can write? Is it true for any one that there is no use in trying? Here is the testimony of George Herbert Palmer.<sup>1</sup> What Professor Palmer said in encouragement to an audience of workingmen with little leisure for writing must be doubly reassuring to a class of college students:

No human employment is more free and calculable than the winning of language. Undoubtedly there are natural aptitudes for it, as there are for farming, seamanship, or being a good husband. But nowhere is straight work more effective. Persistence, care, discriminating observation, ingenuity, refusal to lose heart, — traits which in every other occupation tend toward excellence, — tend toward it here with special security.

<sup>1</sup> *Self-Cultivation in English*, George Herbert Palmer. Houghton Mifflin.

**A difficult art.** — Almost always, too, the student who begins by saying, “I never *could* write,” will continue, “Look at so-and-so. I’m sure that he dashes off his papers the morning they’re due, and he gets an A every time. And I work for hours on mine — and see the result!” Again listen to Professor Palmer:

But the very fact that literary endowment is immediately recognized and eagerly envied has induced a strange illusion in regard to it. It is supposed to be something mysterious, innate in him who possesses it, and quite out of the reach of him who has it not. The very contrary is the fact.

Lafcadio Hearn,<sup>1</sup> talking to students in Japan, warned them against the “foolish belief that great work, or even worthy work, can be done without pains — without very great pains. . . . Above all things,” he insisted, “do not imagine that any good work can be done without immense pains.”

No man can produce real literature at one writing. I know that there are a great many stories about famous men sitting down to write a wonderful book at one effort, and never even correcting the manuscript afterwards. But I must tell you that the consensus of literary experience declares nearly all these stories to be palpable lies. To produce even a single sentence of good literature requires that the text be written at least three times. But for one who is beginning, three times three were not too much. . . . And you will find that to reproduce the real thought faithfully in words will require a great deal of time. I am quite sure that few of you will try to do work in this way in the beginning; you will try every other way first, and have many disappointments. Only painful experience can assure you of the necessity of doing this. For literature more than for any other art, the all-necessary thing is patience.

In an amusing article in the *American Magazine* Irvin S. Cobb<sup>2</sup> tells how he “dashes off” his stories:

<sup>1</sup> *Talks to Writers*, Lafcadio Hearn, edited by John Erskine. Dodd, Mead.

<sup>2</sup> “How to Begin at the Top and Work Down,” Irvin S. Cobb. *American Magazine*, August, 1925.



You should see me some morning when I'm in the mood for dashing off the stuff. There I sit, dashing it off at the rate of about an inch and a half an hour, and using drops of sweat for punctuations. I'm the same sort of impetuous dasher that the Muir Glacier is. And so is every other writer I know who is getting by with it. They say Thackeray worked three weeks once over a single paragraph, and then threw it away and started in all over again. What ails the rest of us is that we work long hours over those paragraphs, and then haven't sense enough to throw them away. We leave them in. . . .

. . . I learned the rudiments of my trade by main strength and awkwardness. Also by serving a twenty-year apprenticeship of training in newspaper shops. Also by continually polishing my work and swearing at it and perspiring over it, and frequently almost expiring over it, in an effort to make the present bit of handicraft better stuff than the one before it was.

If the power to write should ever be "something mysterious, innate in him who possesses it," it should surely be so with the poet. But Miss Amy Lowell, herself no inconsiderable practitioner, has said that "the poet must learn his trade in the same manner, and with the same painstaking care, as the cabinet-maker." In her life of Keats<sup>1</sup> she reminds us:

Keats corrected and corrected. All good poets correct. . . . His early drafts are full of alterations done in the very heat of composition. . . .

. . . The first draft of the *Eve of St. Agnes*, in my collection, is so altered and rewritten as to be almost unreadable. . . .

And why should this not be true of writing? Is it not true of every other art? Is it not true of every form of skill in whatever field it is displayed?

Paderewsky himself is chained to the keyboard. The Morphys of chess keep in form and study new problems, I believe. And the Hoppes of billiards and Ty Cobbs of baseball were not altogether born so.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *John Keats*, Amy Lowell. Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>2</sup> *The Genius of Style*, W. C. Brownell. Scribner.

Perhaps the most eloquent and convincing words that can be quoted to dispel forever this "strange illusion" that writing is easy for the elect and impossible for all else are to be found in the opening pages of Robert Louis Stevenson's essay, "A College Magazine."<sup>1</sup> Although we may not care to follow in detail the method suggested by Stevenson, his remarks are so helpful in determining our attitude toward writing that I am giving them almost in full:

All through my boyhood and youth, I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version-book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words. And what I thus wrote was for no ulterior use, it was written consciously for practice. It was not so much that I wished to be an author (though I wished that too) as that I had vowed that I would learn to write. That was a proficiency that tempted me; and I practised to acquire it, as men learn to whittle, in a wager with myself. Description was the principal field of my exercise; for to any one with senses there is always something worth describing, and town and country are but one continuous subject. But I worked in other ways also; often accompanied my walks with dramatic dialogues, in which I played many parts; and often exercised myself in writing down conversations from memory.

This was all excellent, no doubt; so were the diaries I sometimes tried to keep, but always and very speedily discarded, finding them a school of posturing and melancholy self-deception. And yet this was not the most efficient part of my training. Good though it was, it only taught me (so far as I have learned them at all) the lower and less intellectual elements of the art, the choice of the essential note and the right word. . . . And regarded as training, it had one grave defect; for it set me no standard of achievement. So there was perhaps more profit, as there was certainly more effort, in my secret

<sup>1</sup> *Memories and Portraits*, Robert Louis Stevenson. Scribner.



labours at home. Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction, and in the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann. I remember one of these monkey tricks, which was called *The Vanity of Morals*: it was to have had a second part, *The Vanity of Knowledge*; and as I had neither morality nor scholarship, the names were apt; but the second part was never attempted, and the first part was written (which is my reason for recalling it, ghost-like, from its ashes) no less than three times: first in the manner of Hazlitt, second in the manner of Ruskin, who had cast on me a passing spell, and third, in a laborious pasticcio of Sir Thomas Browne.

. . . Even at the age of thirteen I had tried to do justice to the inhabitants of the famous city of Peebles in the style of the *Book of Snobs*. So I might go on for ever, through all my abortive novels, and down to my later plays, of which I think more tenderly, for they were not only conceived at first under the bracing influence of old Dumas, but have met with resurrections: one, strangely bettered by another hand, came on the stage itself and was played by bodily actors; the other, originally known as *Semiramis: a Tragedy*, I have observed on bookstalls under the *alias* of *Prince Otto*. But enough has been said to show by what arts of impersonation, and in what purely ventriloquial efforts I first saw my words on paper.

That, like it or not, is the way to learn to write; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. It was so Keats learned, and there was never a finer temperament for literature than Keats's; it was so, if we could trace it out, that all men have learned; and that is why a revival of letters is always accompanied or heralded by a cast back to earlier and fresher models. Perhaps I hear some one cry out: But this is not the way to be original! It is not; nor is there any way but to be born so. Nor yet, if you are born original, is there anything in this training that shall clip the wings of your originality. There can be none more original than Montaigne, neither could any be more

unlike Cicero; yet no craftsman can fail to see how much the one must have tried in his time to imitate the other. . . . Nor is there anything here that should astonish the considerate. Before he can tell what cadences he truly prefers, the student should have tried all that are possible; before he can choose and preserve a fitting key of words, he should long have practised the literary scales; and it is only after years of such gymnastic that he can sit down at last, legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice, and he himself knowing what he wants to do and (within the narrow limits of a man's ability) able to do it.

"That, like it or not, is the way to learn to write." There is no one who can write without the "straight work," the "persistence, care, discriminating observation, ingenuity, refusal to lose heart" of Professor Palmer; none who can write without having practiced the "literary scales" of Stevenson.

**Description as a field of writing.** — "Description was the principal field of my exercise," says Stevenson; "for to any one with senses there is always something worth describing, and town and country are but one continuous subject." But, you may ask, is description worth such painstaking endeavor as we are called upon to give? Is it not a rather unimportant kind of writing, a sort of handmaid serving other forms of writing in essay or story? Does it satisfy any real need of our mind? We can appreciate the necessity for the rigorous training in logical reasoning and clear, cogent expression that we get through a course in expository writing. But why description?

The answer may well come to us again from those who have the authority to speak. Carlyle writes in "The Hero as Poet":

For though this of painting is one of the outermost developments of a man, it comes like all else from the essential faculty of him; it is physiognomical of the whole man. Find a man whose words paint you a likeness, you have found a man worth something; mark his manner of doing it, as very characteristic of him. In the first place, he could not have discerned the object at all, or seen the vital type



of it, unless he had, what we may call, *sympathised* with it — had sympathy in him to bestow on objects. He must have been *sincere* about it too; sincere and sympathetic: a man without worth cannot give you the likeness of any object; he dwells in vague outwardness, fallacy and trivial hearsay, about all objects.

Training, then, in giving the “likeness of any object” may save us from being “men without worth,” dwelling in “vague outwardness, fallacy and trivial hearsay, about all objects.”

Browning has a word to add to Carlyle’s. He is speaking literally, in his poem “Fra Lippo Lippi,” of the painter with palette and brush, but what he says is equally true of the painter with words:

. . . You’ve seen the world  
— The beauty and the wonder and the power,  
The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,  
Changes, surprises, — and God made it all!  
— For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,  
For this fair town’s face, yonder river’s line,  
The mountain round it and the sky above,  
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,  
These are the frame to? What’s it all about?  
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,  
Wondered at? oh, this last of course! — you say.  
But why not do as well as say, — paint these  
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?  
God’s works — paint any one, and count it crime  
To let a truth slip. Don’t object, “His works  
Are here already; nature is complete:  
Suppose you reproduce her — (which you can’t)  
There’s no advantage! you must beat her, then.”  
For, don’t you mark? we’re made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;  
And so they are better, painted — better to us,  
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out.

And Shelley, in *A Defence of Poetry*, says in prose of poetry what Browning has just said in verse of painting. We may apply this too, as we did the other, to prose description:

It purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration.

Browning's painter thinks of the work of his hands as helping others to see. To others he lends his mind. But this mind that truly sees the world gains pleasure also for itself from the seeing. Miss Rebecca West shows us the young girl of her novel, *The Judge*,<sup>1</sup> looking out upon the Edinburgh street. She tells us:

She had this rich consciousness of her surroundings. . . . It kept her happy even now, when from time to time she had to lick up a tear with the point of her tongue, on the thin joy of the twilight. Really the world was very beautiful.

Indeed, Mr. Gilbert K. Chesterton<sup>2</sup> points out that it was principally Browning's "rich consciousness" of his surroundings that brought the poet his great joy in life:

Browning's optimism is of that ultimate and unshakeable order that is founded upon the absolute sight, and sound, and smell, and handling of things. If a man had gone up to Browning and asked him with all the solemnity of the eccentric, "Do you think life is worth living?" it is interesting to conjecture what his answer might have been. . . . If he . . . had simply answered the question . . . with the real, vital answer that awaited it in his own soul, he would have said as likely as not, "Crimson toadstools in Hampshire." Some plain, glowing picture of this sort left on his mind would be his real verdict on what the universe had meant to him.

<sup>1</sup> *The Judge*, Rebecca West. Doran.

<sup>2</sup> *Robert Browning*, G. K. Chesterton. Macmillan.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MATERIALS OF DESCRIPTION

Sight and sound and smell and handling of things. — This “absolute sight, and sound, and smell, and handling of things,” which Mr. Chesterton considers the root of optimism, is the material of descriptive writing. When we want to make our words recreate for others the experiences that have reached us through eye, and ear, and nose, and palate, and finger tips, we write description. When we read words of others “about the shining, colored, sounding, hot, cold, bitter, sweet things which must have touched and smitten their senses,”<sup>1</sup> we read description. Description finds its subjects in *things* — such things as Rupert Brooke<sup>2</sup> loved:

These I have loved:

White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,  
Ringed with blue lines; and feathery, faery dust;  
Wet roofs, beneath the lamp-light; the strong crust  
Of friendly bread; and many-tasting food;  
Rainbows; and the blue bitter smoke of wood;  
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The benison of hot water; furs to touch;  
The good smell of old clothes; and other such —  
The comfortable smell of friendly fingers,  
Hair’s fragrance, and the musty reek that lingers  
About dead leaves and last year’s ferns. . . .

Dear names,  
And thousand other throng to me! Royal flames;  
Sweet water’s dimpling laugh from tap or spring;

<sup>1</sup> *The Handling of Words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology*, Vernon Lee. Dodd, Mead.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*. Dodd, Mead.



Holes in the ground; and voices that do sing;  
 Voices in laughter, too; and body's pain,  
 Soon turned to peace; and the deep-panting train;  
 Firm sands; the little dulling edge of foam  
 That browns and dwindles as the wave goes home;  
 And washen stones, gay for an hour; the cold  
 Graveness of iron; moist black earthen mould;  
 Sleep; and high places; footprints in the dew;  
 And oaks; and brown horse-chestnuts, glossy-new;  
 And new-peeled sticks; and shiny pools on grass; —  
 All these have been my loves.

**The child's love of things.** — This love of things is the gift of all of us when we are children.

When I was a little boy [writes the author of a paper on "The Flavor of Things" in the Contributors Club of the *Atlantic Monthly*<sup>1</sup>] I used to get a great deal of satisfaction out of stroking a kitten or a puppy, or crushing a lilac leaf-bud for its spring fragrance, or smelling newly turned soil, or tasting the sharp acid of a grape tendril, or feeling the green coolness of the skin of a frog. I could pore for long minutes over a lump of pudding-stone, a bean-seedling, a chrysalis, a knot in a joist in the attic. There was a curious contentment to be found in these things. My pockets were always full of shells and stones, twigs and bugs; my room in the attic, of Indian relics, fragments of ore, birds' eggs, oak-galls, dry seeds and seaweeds, bottled spiders, butterflies on corks. All the lessons of the schoolroom seemed of no consequence compared with Things so full of intimacy, of friendliness.

All children love things in this way, because of their appeal to the senses; and I suppose that all older people do, too, though they may not know it.

Dr. Samuel McChord Crothers's "The Ignominy of Being Grown-Up"<sup>2</sup> records another small boy's delight in things:

For four years my Philosopher has been interrogating Nature, and he has not yet begun to exhaust the subject. Though he has

<sup>1</sup> *Essays and Essay-Writing*, William M. Tanner. Little, Brown.

<sup>2</sup> *By the Christmas Fire*, Samuel McChord Crothers. Houghton Mifflin.



accumulated a good deal of experience, he is still in his intellectual prime. He has not yet reached the "school age," which in most persons marks the beginning of the senile decay of the poetic imagination.

In my walks and talks with my Philosopher I have often been amazed at my own limitations. . . . In comparing notes with my Philosopher I am chagrined at my own color-blindness. He recognizes so many superlative excellences to which I am stupidly oblivious.

In one of our walks we stop at the grocer's, I having been asked to fill the office of domestic purveyor. It is a case where the office has sought the man, and not the man the office. Lest we forget, everything has been written down so that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein, — baking-powder and coffee and a dozen eggs, and last and not least, and under no circumstances to be forgotten, a cake of condensed yeast. These things weigh upon my spirits. The thought of that little yeast-cake shuts out any disinterested view of the store. It is nothing to me but a prosaic collection of the necessities of life. I am uncheered by any sense of romantic adventure.

Not so with my Philosopher. He is in the rosy dawn of expectation. The doors are opened, and he enters into an enchanted country. His eyes grow large as he looks about him. He sees visions of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful in all their bewildering, concrete variety. They are in barrels and boxes and paper bundles. They rise toward the sky in shelves that reach at last the height of the gloriously unattainable. He walks through the vales of Arcady, among pickles and cheeses. He lifts up his eyes wonderingly to snowy Olympus crowned with Pillsbury's Best. He discovers a magic fountain, not spurting up as if it were but for a moment, but issuing forth with the mysterious slowness that befits the liquefactions of the earlier world. "What is that?" he asks, and I can hardly frame the prosaic word "Molasses." "Molasses!" he cries, gurgling with content; "what a pretty word!" I hadn't thought about it, but it is a pretty word, and it has come straight down from the Greek word for honey. . . .

**Cultivating the observation of things.** — Some of us, usually poets, like Rupert Brooke, keep these keen senses unspoiled and undimmed as we grow older. Amy Lowell in her life of

Keats quotes from William Sharp's *Life and Letters of Joseph Severn*:

Severn was astonished by his companion's faculty of observation. Nothing seemed to escape him, the song of a bird and the undernote of response from covert or hedge, the rustle of some animal, the changing of the green and brown lights and furtive shadows, the motions of the wind — just how it took certain tall flowers and plants — and the wayfaring of the clouds: even the features and gestures of passing tramps. . . .

Miss West, in a phrase which I omitted when I quoted from *The Judge*, calls this alertness a "fortuitous possession, a mere congenital peculiarity." But if for us it is not a "congenital peculiarity," we need not despair; just as the ability to write may be cultivated, so this may be cultivated. And as without it, congenital or acquired, it is impossible to write one sentence of description, it must be encouraged and developed by students who are beginning a course in descriptive writing. Lord Riddell, in his interesting book *Some Things That Matter*,<sup>1</sup> suggests a method:

Attention is a habit of mind. You can force yourself to pay attention and observe, but if you wish to become an effective, consistent observer you must cultivate the observing habit of mind. . . .

Houdin, the great French conjurer, trained himself to observe by special exercises. He would walk past a shop window and, without stopping, notice and memorize as many of the objects displayed in it as he could; then he wrote down a list of them. At first his lists were short, and his walking pace had to be slow. But by assiduous practice he was able in one quick glance to notice and afterwards record an incredible number of things, and the faculty of swift observation thus acquired was half the secret of his success as a magician.

. . . Can you accurately write down the colour of the eyes of any dozen people you know? You will find it a difficult task. A written record is a wonderful test of observation. If you want to observe

<sup>1</sup> *Some Things That Matter*, George Allardice Riddell. Doran.

accurately, write down what you see. . . . The pen is a wonderful aid to the eye. . . .

Hearing is as important to observation as sight. Some people have more acute hearing than others. But hearing can be developed in the same way as observation through the eye.

Charles Dickens had this power of observation — had it, Walter Bagehot<sup>1</sup> remarks, in an “inordinate measure.” He writes :

We have heard, — we do not know whether correctly or incorrectly, — that he can go down a crowded street, and tell you all that is in it, what each shop was, what the grocer’s name was, how many scraps of orange-peel there were on the pavement. His works give you exactly the same idea. The amount of detail which there is in them is something amazing, — to an ordinary writer something incredible. There are single pages containing telling *minutiæ*, which other people would have thought enough for a volume. . . . He has . . . the peculiar alertness of observation that is observable in those who live by it. He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity.

**Developing all the senses: Hearing.** — When we use the word *observation*, the sense that we have in mind is almost always sight; and too often descriptive writing appeals chiefly to the eye and ignores the other senses. Frequently we hear descriptive writing spoken of as “word painting”; and although the analogy is helpful in so far as it emphasizes the concrete subject matter of description, it is harmful if it limits us to form, size, texture, light and shade, color — to all that the artist can represent with paint on canvas — and makes us neglect the additional wealth of experience that the writer can suggest with words. The sense of hearing alone, for example, may furnish sufficient material for description, as it does in Mr. H. G. Wells’s passage:

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Studies*, Walter Bagehot. Longmans, Green.



It was a steady stream of din, from which the ear picked out first one thread and then another; there was the intermittent snorting, panting, and seething of the steam engines, the suck and thud of their pistons, the dull beat on the air as the spokes of the great driving wheels came round, a note the leather straps made as they ran tighter and looser, and a fretful tumult from the dynamos; and, over all, sometimes inaudible as the ear tired of it, and then creeping back upon the senses again, was this trombone note of the great machine.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Riddell, you will remember, makes the point that hearing is as important to observation as sight.

**Developing all the senses: Smell.** — Lord Riddell might have insisted also on smell as a sense valuable to life and to literature. Mr. Rudyard Kipling, in an address before the Royal Geographical Society, was reported by the *New York Times*<sup>2</sup> as having spoken of travel pictures conjured up by some chance smell. He had noticed that whenever a few travelers gather together, they are sure to recall the *smell* of the places they have visited. For them the reek of a fried fish shop can recall all the East from Cairo to Singapore; one whiff of camel can bring back all Arabia; the smell of rotten eggs can take them to Hitton on the Euphrates, or the odor of drying fish to Burma.

Two smells, he suggested, and only two, appeal to all of us. Are these smells of universal appeal really limited to two, or would it be possible to add to Mr. Kipling's short list? His choice is the smell of the burning fuel over which a man cooks his food, and the smell of the hot grease in which he cooks it. A whiff of wood smoke, he tells us, can take him back to marches, otherwise forgotten, "over unnamed mountains with disreputable companions, to day-long halts beside flooded rivers in the rain; . . . to uneasy wakings under a low desert moon and on top of

<sup>1</sup> *The Door in the Wall and Other Stories*, H. G. Wells. Mitchell Kennerley.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, February 18, 1914.



cruel hard pebbles.” Above all it evokes for him that hour “when the stars have gone out, and it is too dark to see clear, and one lies with the fumes of last night’s embers in one’s nostrils — lies and waits for a new horizon to heave itself up against a new dawn.”

It is not only the far East that may be remembered by its smells; the far West has

the dry pungent smell of lichens and dwarf wild flowers up above the timber-line; the cool smell of stream beds in fir-clad ravines; the smell of glaciers on a hot day; the curiously Oriental smell that comes from the chimneys of log-houses burning wood; . . . a dusk acridly sweet with catnip and wind and mountain-meadow dampness . . .<sup>1</sup>

W. H. Hudson,<sup>2</sup> writing on the sense of smell, notes :

It is related of Wordsworth that he was without the sense of smell, and that on one occasion when he was sitting on a spring day in his flowery garden, the unknown sense suddenly came to him to astonish and delight with the lovely novel sensation. He described it as being like a vision of Paradise. A similar vision has been mine at frequent intervals all my life; I doubt if its loveliness has been less in my case than in that of the poet, to whom it came once as by a miracle. When a gust of flowery fragrance comes to me, as when I walk by a blossoming beanfield or a field of lucerne, it is always like a new and wonderful experience, a delightful surprise.

Hudson loves Chaucer for the “acuteness of his senses” and his “childlike delight in sights and sounds and smells”:

Reading Wordsworth and Ruskin, nature appears to me as a picture — it has no sound, no smell, no *feel*. In Chaucer you have it all in its highest expression; he alone is capable of saying, in some open woodland space with the fresh smell of earth in his nostrils, that this is more to him than meat or drink or any other thing, and that since the beginning there was never anything so pleasant known to earthly man.

<sup>1</sup> *The Diary of a Dude-Wrangler*, Struthers Burt. Scribner.

<sup>2</sup> *A Hind in Richmond Park*, W. H. Hudson. E. P. Dutton.

Another author whose sensitiveness to smell has survived childhood and now helps to make vivid his descriptions of the boyhood days of his book-children is Mr. Richard Pryce. To his little boy in *David Penstephen*<sup>1</sup>

Everything smelled different. In the grocer's shop where some of the provisions were bought, there was the most delicious smell that David had ever smelt. It was compounded of many things, but sugar-candy, dried figs, and coffee were its most recognisable ingredients. The molasses and the sugar-cane of the boys' books, which became part of his life later on, always made him think of this shop. He carried, indeed, a recollection of it through the length of his days. It took its place amongst the nice smells which he stored in his mind. Everything had its smell for David's young nostrils: the faces of Georgina's wax dolls; the tin ducks with the shining metallic colours which he "swam" in his bath and which followed a magnet; his leaden soldiers; his tops; his box of paints; doll's-house furniture, the little wooden chests-of-drawers particularly; books, their bindings — a gluey smell; and many things which weren't supposed to have a smell at all, such as marbles and glass and china. Natural, then, that for David different countries should have their distinguishing smells — different towns even. The smell of Brussels, for instance, was quite different from that of Antwerp, but both were Belgian, and quite different from French. Cookery entered into the smells of all towns. David knew Swiss smells (there were not many, somehow) from Italian. Homburg he told Betty smelt German — but not a bit like Cologne.

Perhaps the most convincing proof of the pleasure of smell in life and the effectiveness of smell in description may be found in Du Maurier's loving memory of the smell of Paris:

There were whole streets — and these by no means the least fascinating and romantic — where the unwritten domestic records of every house were afloat in the air outside it — records not all savory or sweet, but always full of interest and charm!

One knew at a sniff as one passed the *porte cochère* what kind of people lived behind and above, what they ate and what they drank,

<sup>1</sup> *David Penstephen*, Richard Pryce. Houghton Mifflin.

and what their trade was; whether they did their washing at home and burned tallow or wax, and mixed chicory with their coffee, and were over-fond of Gruyère cheese — the biggest, cheapest, plainest, and most formidable cheese in the world; whether they fried with oil or butter, and liked their omelets overdone and garlic in their salad, and sipped black-currant brandy or anisette as a liqueur; and were overrun with mice and used cats or mouse-traps to get rid of them, or neither; and bought violets, or pinks, or gillyflowers in season, and kept them too long; and fasted on Friday with red or white beans, or lentils, or had a dispensation from the Pope — or, haply, even dispensed with the Pope's dispensation.

For of such a telltale kind were the overtones in that complex, odorous clang. . . .

And here, as I write, the faint, scarcely perceptible, ghost-like suspicion of a scent — a mere nostalgic fancy, compound, generic, synthetic and all-embracing — an abstract olfactory symbol of the "Tout Paris" of fifty years ago, comes back to me out of the past; and fain would I inhale it in all its pristine fullness and vigor. For scents, like musical sounds, are rare sublimators of the essence of memory (this is a prodigious fine phrase — I hope it means something), and scents need not be seductive in themselves to recall the seductions of scenes and days gone by.

Oh, that I could hum or whistle an old French smell! I could evoke all Paris . . . in a single whiff!<sup>1</sup>

**Senses in contemporary descriptive writing.** — It would be enlightening for a student to search the work of an author for evidence of a wide, varied, accurate, loving use of the senses. It was this sort of thing Keats did, and you will remember that Stevenson said, "There was never a finer temperament for literature than Keats's." Amy Lowell points out that "Keats's observation and love for poetry combined is shown by the passages he marked in the books he read," and that these scored passages show "how often Keats was attracted by descriptions of colours, by pictures appealing directly to one or more of the

<sup>1</sup> *Peter Ibbetson*, George Du Maurier. Harper.



senses.” If each student in a class should select a different author and give the class a report of his “appreciative scorings,” the whole group would have the benefit of the reading of each member of it. A suggestion as to the form the report may take will be found in the following selections from a *New York Times* review of Edward Martin Taber’s *Stowe Notes*<sup>1</sup>:

Taber . . . seems to have had a sensitiveness to sound such as might have made amends to one who was sightless. . . . His journal echoes an infinity of sounds, — the wind fingering at his shutters, . . . the clamor of the crows, the unearthly beauty of the thrush tongue, the patter of rain on the grass, the thin, wintry note of the snowbird in the evergreens. He writes:

“I sat down to rest under the white pine; at a rod or two distant, as I drew toward it, I was aware of its singing. . . .

“The white pine is a king in eloquence, a wizard in ventriloquism. Sometimes his voice is loud, surging in my ears; it lessens, it fades, it seems to speak from indefinable distance.

“There is a fine sibilant tone in the louder and higher notes, and yet there is a depth to them that the adjective fails to touch. I have never attached much meaning to the phrase, ‘The souging of the wind,’ but it seems adequately to describe this sound.

“The pine falls to silence and then a low, distant moan, the rumbling of the wind in the encircling woods, is audible. The wind soughs in the trees, grows loud, and dies; it reminds me of a great orchestra, when on the inarticulate grumbling of the basses, swells the eerie plaint of the violins.”

And again the journal contains this passage:

“Night sounds:

“Of the winds, there is much variety in tone and character.

“The most frequent here, the west wind, is a wild spirit. All the wind voices that thrill and startle are his — wailing cries in despairing accents, sounds of hooting and moaning, and shriller screams and whistlings. His attacks are fierce and persistent, too.

“When at night I hear a low rumbling under the eaves, and the trees beginning to roar, I know there’ll be no cessation until either the clouds are broken and scattered, or the wind changes its direction.

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, June 15, 1913.



"If from the north, it comes with a cold and steady flow almost voiceless, slipping through the bare branches without a perceptible sound, perhaps moaning softly at the corners of the house, but always in the pine that stands in the dooryard arousing a voice that sighs and murmurs with ceaseless sweetness, rising to a thin and airy whisper, and again, gathering power, until it sinks to a deep, sonorous soughing — a monody infinitely sad and soothing.

"The south wind is at once blustering and stealthy. His onset is almost as terrific as the wild west wind, but when you wait for the full force of the gale this outburst presages, there comes a sudden lull, a moment of silence almost, when some airy voice in the distance, scarcely audible, dies on the ear and there come some light and startling sounds, as of the lift of the slats in the shutter, or as if deft and invisible fingers tried the fastenings of the window. These bursts of the south wind through a leafless orchard will pass like the roll of muffled drums."

If Taber was sensitive to every stirring sound in all the out-of-doors, he was sensitive, too, to every shifting note of color. He carried home from his walks the memories of "the glowing maroon, the rusty crimson" of the stag-horn sumac; of white wreaths of blown smoke along the housetops; of blue shadows on the snow; and of the white wings of pigeons flashing against a gray sky.

Often one recognizes in his notes the memoranda of the landscape painted, a sketch in words for future use to serve the same purpose as the little penciled sketch your painter of the countryside makes on the envelope rummaged for in his pocket. Witness:

"Sky overcast: interesting spongy clouds to the northeast; ovals (lakes) and strips of light metallic blue; strong wind from west-southwest; dead leaves in the wind, like animate impish things; undersides of bay leaves; a true autumn day.

"Oh, the charm of bare twigs, the silvery twigs of little beeches! Leaves of sweet gum turning soberly a bronze red, like some oak leaves."

In this manner the student may report not only, as in this book review, on sound and sight, but also on smell and taste and touch. He will look, too, for the use in description of such physical sensations as being wet or dry, hot or cold. He may use books like *Stowe Notes* that are largely descriptive of na-

ture — the works of Richard Jefferies, Thoreau, John Burroughs, John Muir, W. H. Hudson, Dallas Lore Sharp, Walter Pritchard Eaton, William Beebe, and many others. He may read books of travel. But it will probably be most helpful for him to study the descriptive element in works of fiction. He may examine H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, Hugh Walpole, Compton Mackenzie, Richard Pryce, Anne Douglas Sedgwick, William McFee, Frank Swinnerton, May Sinclair, Ethel Sidgwick, Katherine Mansfield, Stacy Aumonier, Constance I. Smith, St. John G. Ervine, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Joseph Conrad, Edith Wharton, Mary S. Watts, Booth Tarkington, Joseph Hergesheimer, Willa Cather, Ernest Poole, Sinclair Lewis, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Kathleen Norris. He may take poetry as well as prose, and turn the pages of Amy Lowell and Robert Frost. These lists are, of course, only suggestions. The student may make his own choice. He will do well, however, to keep to books written in his own generation or in a generation not too remote from his own, because writing changes in fashion, as everything else does; and he will have difficulties enough in learning how to write, without the gratuitous difficulty of unlearning a manner of writing that will sound bookish and insincere in him, because it was called forth, not by the conditions of his own day, but by those of a day now past. This recommendation is not to be misinterpreted as implying anything so foolish as that the literature of the past has no meaning or value for us. It does not mean even that a detailed study of the classics would not be of great service to a young writer to-day. It means only that such study is not for the beginner in a brief college course.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SUBJECTS OF DESCRIPTION

**Personal, direct impressions of life.** — What shall we write about? What principle of choice should guide us in the selection of subjects for description? Possibly this question has already been answered for us by the writers whose books we have just been consulting. We cannot have failed to notice that they all find their subjects close at hand, in the life which they see about them, in the life which they themselves are living. It is impossible to doubt the nearness, the actuality, the genuineness of the subject matter which Mr. Bennett uses in *Riceman Steps*, or Mr. Walpole in *The Cathedral*, or Katherine Mansfield in *The Garden Party*, or Mr. Tarkington in *Alice Adams*. Indeed we may say of description in particular what Henry James<sup>1</sup> says of the novel, that the only reason for its existence is “that it does attempt to represent life.” He writes:

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression.

He repeats:

. . . The air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel — the merit on which all its other merits . . . helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist.

<sup>1</sup> *Partial Portraits*, Henry James. Macmillan.



They are his inspiration, his despair, his reward, his torment, his delight. It is here in very truth that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle. . . . All life solicits him, and to "render" the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business.

Again and again he insists that the writer must "try and catch the colour of life itself."

This is, of course, no new tendency in creative writing and no new principle in criticism. Yet an observer<sup>1</sup> noticed in a generation earlier than ours what any reader of student themes could confirm from his own experience to-day: that "many a man who has never been beyond his own village will be silent about that which he knows well, and will fancy himself called upon to speak of the tropics or the Andes — on the reports of others." And George Henry Lewes, like Henry James, tells us that "unless by personal experience . . . a man has gained clear insight into the facts of life, he cannot successfully place them before us. . . . Let a man look for himself and tell truly what he sees. We will listen to that. We must listen to it, for its very authenticity has a subtle power of compulsion. What others have seen and felt we can learn better from their own lips."

**The beauty of the commonplace.** — At this point some one is sure to groan, "But there is nothing interesting in our own life, our own neighborhood, our own home! It is ordinary and commonplace." Edward Rowland Sill<sup>2</sup> indignantly echoes these objections:

<sup>1</sup> *The Principles of Success in Literature*, George Henry Lewes. Allyn and Bacon.

<sup>2</sup> *The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill*. Houghton Mifflin.



The years monotonous? The same old seasons, and weathers, and aspects of nature? Never anything new to admire or wonder at?

And he answers roundly and soundly:

The monotony is in our eyesight, which goes on seeing nothing but the common and unvariable things; simply because, from long familiarity, these are the easy things to see.

We may find the same verdict given in a little essay on "Acquiring a Sense of the Picturesque"<sup>1</sup>:

Like almost everything else in life, apparently, from a taste for olives to one for camembert, the sense of the picturesque seems to be an acquired habit with most of us. To learn to see and find pleasure in the unusual [but I should go farther and say, with emphasis, *usual*] aspects of things about us calls for the cultivation of our observing faculties in new ways. An artist friend told me of a fellow painter he had met in Venice who said he could see nothing there to paint. It is this way with many city dwellers. They overlook the pictures that confront them on every side. In New York, beyond question one of the most picturesque cities in the world, thousands pass by the things that lie close at hand. . . . Once some one with an observing eye, a visitor from the outside who comes to it for the first time — some foreign artist maybe, who knows his world — becomes enthusiastic over some hitherto undiscovered picture, how they begin to confront you at every turn as you walk the streets! . . .

New York is, indeed, a wonderful and fascinating city, even on days of glittering sunlight with blue skies as hard as adamant, everything sharply defined, cut out with cameo sharpness. . . .

Soften its hard outlines with a film of mist, a gray curtain of rain, the soft mystery of falling snow — when all the towers look like blue hills against the sky — or shut it in under the cover of night, with its long vistas of receding lights, and it becomes a city of romance with an appeal to the imagination in a thousand ways.

Mr. Louis Untermeyer<sup>2</sup> points out, in *The New Era in American Poetry*, how general among the poets of our day is this feeling

<sup>1</sup> *Scribner's*, October, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *The New Era in American Poetry*, Louis Untermeyer. Henry Holt.

for ordinary life and ordinary things: "They have rediscovered the beauty, the dignity, I might almost say the divine core, of the casual and the commonplace."

We may begin, then, with what lies closest to us — our own neighborhood, our own street, the shops at which we buy, the rooms in which we eat and sleep.

**Test of observation.** — But first, to test our seeing eye and hearing ear, it may be well for all the members of a class to observe the same neighborhood, some section near the college, so that we may compare records, add to ours if our neighbor's is more complete, and correct inaccuracies. In this way students of a college may cover notebook pages with details of city avenue or town street. They may bring their notebooks to class and find that some of them have ignored the colors which others saw — a flight of brown stone stairs, a red brick façade, a house front of cream or tan stucco, the crimson and green jars in the window of a drug store, the yellow curtains at a basement window, the dusty brown of a February hedge, the green line of a window-frame, the yellow heap of grapefruit, or the green and red pyramids of apples on the stand in front of a grocer's. Some may have had no eyes for the irregular line of housetops against the sky; others have had no ears for the rumbling of an elevated train or for the grinding and clanging of a surface car. Some may not have noticed the rhythmical bending and stretching of two workmen pulling at a rope. So each learns his own limitations in observation and tries to train himself to fill out a complete record. For until this has been accomplished, nothing else can be done. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle<sup>1</sup> puts his "Advice to a Young Author" into amusing lines, which are none the less true for being doggerel:

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of the Road*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. John Murray.

First begin  
Taking in;  
Cargo stored,  
All aboard;  
Think about —  
Giving out.  
Empty ship,  
Useless trip!

## CHAPTER IV

### THE METHOD OF DESCRIPTION

**The literary workman as guide.** — Now, however, that the cargo has been stored, the time comes when we must think about giving out. Our accumulations of notes are not description; they are only the raw material from which description may be fashioned. What, then, is the manner of fashioning it? How shall we go about it? Mr. Brownell assures us that “Up to a certain point, at least, learning how means learning some one else’s how.” We cannot do better than apply for instruction to the practiced writer. He may well say to us, in the words of Lafcadio Hearn:

I want to speak to you only as a practical man-of-letters, as one who has served his apprenticeship at the difficult trade of literature. Please understand that in saying this, I am saying only “I am a workman,” just as a carpenter would say to you “I am a carpenter,” or a smith, “I am a smith.” . . . But whether the man be a clumsy and idle workman, or the best carpenter in town, you know that he can tell you something which you do not know. He has learned how to handle tools, and how to choose the kind of wood best adapted to certain kinds of manufacture. He may be a cheat; he may be very careless about what he does; but it is quite certain that you could learn something from him, because he has served an apprenticeship, and knows, by constant practice of hand and eye, how a carpenter’s work should be done.<sup>1</sup>

So we turn for guidance to the literary workman. We shall try to choose, not the “clumsy and idle workman,” the “cheat,” “careless about what he does,” but, if not the “best workman

<sup>1</sup> *Talks to Writers*, Lafcadio Hearn. Dodd, Mead.



in town," at least the workman who seems best for our immediate purpose. We shall not ask that he put into words for us the secret of his processes; this may not be the sort of thing he cares to do. We shall examine his handwork as the art student scrutinizes the canvas of the master painter, and try to learn from the finished picture how he handled his brush and how he mixed his paint; what effects he tried to produce and what methods he followed in producing them. Nor need we fear that this will destroy for us any of our joy in the beauty of literature, for, as Amy Lowell says, "A work of beauty which cannot stand an intimate examination is a poor, jerry-built thing." This is, indeed, equivalent to saying that there is *no* work of beauty which cannot stand an intimate examination. And certainly no one can read with more intelligent appreciation or greater enjoyment than the one who is himself attempting, however clumsily, the difficult perplexities of construction which he sees triumphantly cleared up in the pages under his eye.

**Unity of tone: Harmony of material.** — With *our* accumulation of notes in mind, then, we examine what experienced writers have made of *their* notes. We select, naturally, descriptions which show rather clearly the principles of their composition. No one can read the following paragraph from *The Pastor's Wife*<sup>1</sup> without realizing the effect the writer aimed at and the means she took to achieve it:

It was raining at Redchester when Ingeborg got out at the station . . . the soft persistent fine rain, hardly more than a mist, peculiar to that much-soaked corner of England. The lawns in the gardens she passed as her fly crawled up the hill were incredibly green, the leaves of the lilac bushes glistened with wet, each tulip was a cup of water, the roads were chocolate, and a thick grey blanket of cloud hung warm over the town. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *The Pastor's Wife*. Doubleday, Page.

After this rain-soaked English landscape, we may see how Professor Brander Matthews<sup>1</sup> uses a February thaw in a like manner — hearing, seeing, feeling every detail of the New York street only as it is affected by the condition of the weather:

There had been a hesitating fall of snow in the morning, but before noon it had turned to a mild and fitful rain that had finally modified itself into a clinging mist as evening drew near. The heavy snow-storm of the last week in January had left the streets high on both sides with banks that thawed swiftly whenever the sun came out again, the water running from them into the broad gutters, and then freezing hard at night, when the cold wind crept across the city. Now, at nightfall, after a muggy day, a sickening slush had spread treacherously over all the crossings. The shop-girls going home had to pick their way from corner to corner under the iron pillars of the elevated railroad. Train followed train overhead, each close on the other's heels; and clouds of steam swirled down as the engines came to a full stop with a shrill grinding of the brakes. From the skeleton spans of the elevated road moisture dripped on the cable-cars below, as they rumbled along with their bells clanging sharply when they neared the crossings. The atmosphere was thick with a damp haze; and there was a halo about every yellow globe in the windows of the bar-rooms at the four corners of the avenue. More frequent, as the dismal day wore to an end, was the hoarse and lugubrious tooting of the ferryboats in the East River.

The opening pages of *The Green Mirror*<sup>2</sup> are dominated by the fog:

The fog had swallowed up the house, and the house had submitted. So thick was this fog that the towers of Westminster Abbey, the river, and the fat complacency of the church in the middle of the Square, even the three plane trees in front of the old gate, and the heavy old-fashioned porch had all vanished together, leaving in their place the rattle of a cab, the barking of a dog, isolated sounds that ascended, plaintively, from a lost, a submerged world. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Outlines in Local Color*, Brander Matthews. Harper.

<sup>2</sup> *The Green Mirror*, Hugh Walpole. Doran.

And November is in every detail of the following description, from the rain that slants across the hills to the mist that swirls about the mail-carrier at the mail-box:

Indian summer had vanished as suddenly as it came. All day gray clouds had swept low over the prairie, driven by a wild November wind that slanted the rain in steely sheets across the hills, caught up flying leaves, and bent and lashed the maple boughs; and now, in the middle of the afternoon, the kitchen was so dark that Mrs. Mueller had to stoop close to the board to be sure she left no wrinkles in the clothes she was ironing. . . . As she turned toward the stove to change her iron, a dead limb fell from a maple near the house. She stepped to the window and stood looking out between wet leaves the wind had slapped against the pane. Beyond the fallen bough the lawn was littered with smaller branches and twigs. In the swirling mist she could see the mail-carrier, hours late, turning away from the mail-box. . . . <sup>1</sup>

**Unity of tone: Effect on observer.** — But it need not be rain, or slush, or fog that keeps the many parts of a subject in one tone; it may be sunshine, as it is in the “bright sunshiny morning” of “The Paper Windmill” <sup>2</sup>:

The little boy pressed his face against the window-pane and looked out at the bright sunshiny morning. The cobblestones of the square glistened like mica. In the trees, a breeze danced and pranced, and shook drops of sunlight like falling golden coins into the brown water of the canal. Down stream slowly drifted a long string of galliots piled with crimson cheeses. The little boy thought they looked as if they were roc’s eggs, blocks of big ruby eggs. He said, “Oh!” with delight, and pressed against the window with all his might.

The golden cock on the top of the *Stadhuis* gleamed. His beak was open like a pair of scissors and a narrow piece of blue sky was wedged in it. “Cock-a-doodle-do,” cried the little boy. “Can’t you hear me through the window, Gold Cocky? Cock-a-doodle-do! You should crow when you see the eggs of your cousin, the great

<sup>1</sup> “Where’s Minnie,” Alma Burnham Hovey. *The Midland*, January, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> *Men, Women and Ghosts*, Amy Lowell. Houghton Mifflin.



roc." But the golden cock stood stock still, with his fine tail blowing in the wind. He could not understand the little boy, for he said "*Cocorico*" when he said anything. But he was hung in the air to swing, not to sing. His eyes glittered to the bright West wind, and the crimson cheeses drifted away down the canal.

It was very dull there in the big room. Outside in the square, the wind was playing tag with some fallen leaves. A man passed, with a dogcart beside him full of smart, new milk-cans. They rattled out a gay tune: "Tiddity-tum-ti-ti. Have some milk for your tea. Cream for your coffee to drink to-night, thick, and smooth, and sweet, and white," and the man's sabots beat an accompaniment: "Plop! trop! milk for your tea. Plop! trop! drink it to-night." It was very pleasant out there, but it was lonely here in the big room. The little boy gulped at a tear.

It was queer how dull all his toys were. They were so still. Nothing was still in the square. If he took his eyes away a moment it had changed. The milkman had disappeared around the corner, there was only an old woman with a basket of green stuff on her head, picking her way over the shiny stones. But the wind pulled the leaves in the basket this way and that, and displayed them to beautiful advantage. The sun patted them condescendingly on their flat surfaces, and they seemed sprinkled with silver. The little boy sighed as he looked at his disordered toys on the floor. They were motionless, and their colours were dull. The dark wainscoting absorbed the sun. There was none left for toys.

The square was quite empty now. Only the wind ran round and round it, spinning. Away over in the corner where a street opened into the square, the wind had stopped. Stopped running, that is, for it never stopped spinning. It whirred, and whirled, and gyrated, and turned. It burned like a great coloured sun. It hummed, and buzzed, and sparked, and darted. There were flashes of blue, and long smearing lines of saffron, and quick jabs of green. And over it all was a sheen like a myriad cut diamonds. Round and round it went, the great wind-wheel, and the little boy's head reeled with watching it. The whole square was filled with its rays, blazing and leaping round after one another, faster and faster. The little boy could not speak, he could only gaze, staring in amaze.

The wind-wheel was coming down the square. Nearer and nearer it came, a great disc of spinning flame. It was opposite the window

now, and the little boy could see it plainly, but it was something more than the wind which he saw. A man was carrying a huge fan-shaped frame on his shoulder, and stuck in it were many little painted paper windmills, each one scurrying round in the breeze. They were bright and beautiful, and the sight was one to please anybody, and how much more a little boy who had only stupid, motionless toys to enjoy.

The little boy clapped his hands, and his eyes danced and whizzed, for the circling windmills made him dizzy. Closer and closer came the windmill man, and held up his fan to the little boy in the window of the Ambassador's house. Only a pane of glass between the boy and the windmills. They slid round before his eyes in rapidly revolving splendour. There were wheels and wheels of colours — big, little, thick, thin — all one clear, perfect spin. The windmill vendor dipped and raised them again, and the little boy's face was glued to the window-pane. Oh! What a glorious, wonderful plaything! Rings and rings of windy colour always moving! . . .

Miss Lowell's description, you will have seen, is a little different in its treatment from the others. They drew their oneness of effect from themselves; to their harmony of material this adds the effect on the little boy through whose reaction the scene is reported. Sometimes the attitude of the observer toward the subject is expressed even more directly. Mr. Richard Aldington<sup>1</sup> writes:

I hate the town I lived in when I was little;  
 I hate to think of it.  
 There were always clouds, smoke, rain  
 In that dingy little valley.  
 It rained; it always rained.  
 I think I never saw the sun until I was nine.

. . . . .

The long street we lived in  
 Was duller than a drain  
 And nearly as dingy.  
 There were the big College  
 And the pseudo-Gothic town-hall.

<sup>1</sup> *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology.* Houghton Mifflin.

There were the sordid provincial shops —  
The grocer's, and the shops for women,  
The shop where I bought transfers,  
And the piano and gramophone shop  
Where I used to stand  
Staring at the huge shiny pianos and at the pictures  
Of a white dog looking into a gramophone.

How dull and greasy and grey and sordid it was!  
On wet days — it was always wet —  
I used to kneel on a chair  
And look at it from the window.

The dirty yellow trams  
Dragged noisily along  
With a clatter of wheels and bells  
And a humming of wires overhead.  
They threw up the filthy rain-water from the hollow lines  
And then the water ran back  
Full of brownish foam bubbles.

There was nothing else to see —  
It was all so dull —  
Except a few grey legs under shiny black umbrellas  
Running along the grey shiny pavements;  
Sometimes there was a waggon  
Whose horses made a strange loud hollow sound  
With their hoofs  
Through the silent rain.

Mr. Aldington very convincingly hates his town; but Mrs. Dudeney<sup>1</sup> tells us of Angelina, who loved the house she lived in when she was little:

Angelina loved the paternal shop, with its curved steps leading up to the handsome door, with its bowed, small-paned windows where the great coloured bottles burned in fires of green, of amber, and of crimson. All her life had been spent in the spacious house above the

<sup>1</sup> *Set to Partners*, Mrs. Henry Dudeney. Duffield.



shop. . . . Angelina had one perfect moment every day. . . . It was when you came in out of the noisy streets and shut the big front door and went up those shallow stairs of uncarpeted oak, with their carved balustrades. . . . The contrast between the clatter of the streets and the cool silence of the house was certainly marked; for in those days they had not put down the wood pavement in Cheapside.

In another novel<sup>1</sup> there is a Jennie who "liked the crowds, the important clamor of locomotives, the smell of people and sawdust and coal smoke and stale food strangely commingled, the high colors of the magazines flaring from the booths." And if she could draw pleasure from these, judge what would be her delight in a flower market!

Jennie dropped her basket and stood gaping, transfixed. In the whole of her twelve years she had scarcely seen a flower unless decaying on some ash-heap; and now these tiers on tiers of bloom and foliage encompassing her with multitudinous, undreamed colors, shapes, textures, fragrances not only bewildered the child with novelty; they filled her with a solemn and painful delight. When she could remove her gaze from the tall, noble growths on the topmost benches, palms, lilies and what-not (Jennie herself had no notion of their names) she found close at hand others of an equal charm, homely and dear; trays of cuddling pansies, geraniums in soldier rows, fresh-laundered periwinkles, daisies trimly patterned. Jennie stumbled along between them, automatically dodging people's knees and elbows, ducking under shelves, bundles, outstretched arms, scraping her small shanks against sharp wooden edges here and there, rapt in pagan enjoyment. The commonest details of the place fascinated her, the clean smell of earth, the very look of a flower-pot mantled with green and yellowish mold, of a rusty tin watering can standing on the wet bricks. Once or twice somebody glanced for an amused instant at the little girl straying aimlessly from aisle to aisle with her round rosy face, and round blue eyes staring in a sober gladness; but otherwise she went unnoticed until, reaching the farther end of the market-house, she brought up against a barrow full of potted plants which a

<sup>1</sup> *The Rise of Jennie Cushing*, Mary S. Watts. Macmillan.

man in waistcoat and shirtsleeves was busily transferring to one of the benches.

One and the same scene may be looked at with loathing by one observer and with delighted admiration by another. Gopher Prairie appalled Carol Kennicott<sup>1</sup> with "its two-story brick shops, its story-and-a-half wooden residences, its muddy expanse from concrete walk to walk, its huddle of Fords and lumber-wagons."

She glanced through the fly-specked windows of the most pretentious building in sight, . . . the Minniemashie House. It was a tall lean shabby structure, three stories of yellow-streaked wood, the corners covered with sanded pine slabs purporting to symbolize stone. In the hotel office she could see a stretch of bare unclean floor, a line of rickety chairs with brass cuspidors between, a writing-desk with advertisements in mother-of-pearl letters upon the glass-covered back. The dining-room beyond was a jungle of stained table-cloths and catsup bottles.

But to Bea Sorenson, who "had never before been in a town larger than Scandia Crossing, which has sixty-seven inhabitants," Gopher Prairie was a place of enchantment.

As she marched up the street she was meditating that it didn't hardly seem like it was possible there could be so many folks all in one place at the same time. My! It would take years to get acquainted with them all. And swell people too! A fine big gentleman in a new pink shirt with a diamond, and not no washed-out blue denim working-shirt. . . .

Bea saw

A drug store with a soda fountain that was just huge, awful long, and all lovely marble; and on it there was a great big lamp with the biggest shade you ever saw — all different kinds of colored glass stuck together; and the soda spouts, they were silver, and they came right out of the bottom of the lamp-stand! . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Main Street*, Sinclair Lewis. Harcourt, Brace.

Carol saw "inside the store, a greasy marble soda-fountain with an electric lamp of red and green and curdled-yellow mosaic shade." Bea stood in awe before "the Bon Ton Store — big as four barns — my! it would simply scare a person to go in there, with seven or eight clerks all looking at you. And the men's suits, on figures just like human." Carol was disgusted by "suits which looked worn and glossless while they were still new, flabbily draped on dummies like corpses with painted cheeks."

Not always love or hate or even the milder liking is the reaction of the observer to the subject; sometimes it is a quick interest in the novelty of a scene or a comfortable response to its familiar sameness.

He had come to town on an earlier train than he was accustomed to take, and the people whom he passed were not familiar to him. There was a newness to the bright day, even in that, that marked the novel undertaking; the air was cold, but the light was golden. Men went by with yellow chrysanthemums pinned to their coats and a fresh and eager look upon their faces. The clang of the cable-cars had an enlivening condensation of sound in distinction to the hard rumble and jar of the wagons, but all the noises were inspiriting as part of a great and concentrated movement in which the day awoke to an enormous energy — an energy so pervading that even inanimate objects seemed to reflect it, as a mirror reflects the expression of those who look upon it.

His way lay farther up-town than he had been wont to go, above the Wall Street line of work and into that great city of wholesale industries which stretches northward. The streets at this hour were new to him and filled with new sights and sounds: the apple-stands at the corners, being put in order for the day, the sidewalk venders with their small wares, were fewer and of a different order from those he had been used to seeing. The passers-by were different. There were a great many girls in bright hats and shabby jackets, who talked incessantly as they walked, and disappeared down side streets which looked dark and cold and damp in contrast to the bright glitter of Broadway. He turned into one of these streets himself, and walked eastward toward the river.



As it appeared to him to-day, so had it never appeared to him before, and never would again. He might have been in a foreign city, so keenly did he notice every detail. The street was filled at first with drays, loading up with huge boxes from the big warehouses on each side, at the entrances of which men in shirt-sleeves pulled and hauled at the ropes of freight-elevators; then he came to grimy buildings in which was heard the whir of machinery, and he caught a glimpse of men, half stripped, moving backward and forward with strange motions. From across the street came the busy rush of sewing-machines as some one threw up a window and looked out, and a row of girls passed into view with heads bent forward and bodies swaying shoulder to shoulder; beyond were men bending over, pressing, and the steam from the hot irons on the wet cloth poured out around them; and all these toilers seemed no beaten-down wage-earners, but the glad chorus in his own drama of work. Between the factories there began to show neglected narrow brick dwelling-houses, with iron railings and mean, compressed doorways, fronted by garbage-barrels; basement saloons; tiny groceries with bread in the windows and wilted vegetables on the sidewalk, where women with shawled heads were grouped; attenuated furnishing-stores for men, with an ingratiating proprietor in the doorway.<sup>1</sup>

There was a little bakery on this corner, with two gaslights flaring in its window. Several flat pies and small cakes were displayed there, and a limp curtain, on a string, shut off the shop, where a dozen people were waiting now. A bell in the door rang violently, whenever any one came out or in. Susan knew the bakery well, knew when the rolls were hot, and just the price and variety of the cookies and the pies.

She knew, indeed, every inch of the block, a dreary block at best, perhaps especially dreary in this gloomy, pitiless summer twilight. It was lined with shabby, bay-windowed, three-story wooden houses, all exactly alike. Each had a flight of wooden steps running up to the second floor, a basement entrance under the steps, and a small cemented yard, where papers and chaff and orange peels gathered, and grass languished and died. The dining-room of each house was in the basement, and slatternly maids, all along the block, could be seen setting tables, by flaring gas-light, inside. Even the Nottingham lace curtains at the second-story windows seemed akin, although they

<sup>1</sup> *The Wayfarers*, Mary Stewart Cutting. Doubleday, Page.

varied from the stiff, immaculate, well-darned lengths where the Clemenceaus — grandmother, daughter, and granddaughter, and direct descendants of the Comte de Moran — were genteelly starving to death, to the soft, filthy, torn strips that finished off the parlor of the noisy, cheerful, irrepressible Daleys' own pretentious home. . . . Poverty spoke through the unobtrusive little signs over every bell, "Rooms," and through the larger signs that said "Costello. Modes and Children's Dressmaker." Still another sign in a second-story bay said "Alice, Milliner," and a few hats, dimly discernible from the street, bore out the claim.<sup>1</sup>

**Continuity of interest.** — We find, then, that we may achieve a unity of effect throughout our description by being keenly aware of the way in which every detail is influenced by the season, the hour of day or night, the state of the weather; the way the sunshine falls upon it or the wind blows. We may put an observer (ourselves or some other) right on the page and let the reader get the subject as it is reflected in the observer's response to it. And this method has the further great advantage that it carries the reader on from detail to detail, holding the hand, as it were, of Jennie or Susan, and being urged along by her interest in the scene and by his interest in her. This reader is always in our mind. For him we must plan; for him we must arrange our material so that he may follow the many details with ease and with interest. Now I think that we shall find no other way so clear and so compelling as this. It is possible, of course, to present our material directly, without any interposing personality to shed upon it the light of his reaction to it. It is possible to arrange the parts in so orderly a fashion and to make the transition from detail to detail so plain that the reader may progress without hesitation and without difficulty from each one to the next. But unless we have some magic of tone or phrase to take the place of the more easily gained interest of a boy at the window or a girl in the street, our descrip-

<sup>1</sup> *Saturday's Child*, Kathleen Norris. Doubleday, Page.



tion is likely to be stiff and wooden, to gain no reader, perhaps, except the solitary theme-reader, who must, alas, read interesting and uninteresting alike. It cannot be said that the following description, which opens Florence Olmstead's *Father Bernard's Parish*,<sup>1</sup> is without interest; but can it be said that it would not be more interesting still if Mrs. Halligan had been allowed to go beyond the "carpets on the stair" and had been our guide through the entire neighborhood?

Columbus Avenue, in the neighborhood of One Hundredth Street, is given over to small shops. They are wedged in beside each other in dreary sequence, broken only by the fruit and vegetable stalls that gladden the eye with color — plenty of it, fresh and varied. Market-ers hurry up and down the street in the morning hours, children possess it at all times, playing "hop-sotch" in and out among the shoppers, shrieking in their ears, or, perhaps, running into the unwary with small wagons of wonderful construction. The place is cluttered with their belongings. Industrious little girls embroider in groups before doors that open into dark hallways. Delivery-wagons are lined up along the curb. Sometimes a horse stands with his fore feet up on the pavement, soliciting the friendly notice which affectionate natures demand, and, here and there, a push-cart man or a knife-grinder takes his stand. Beyond these the moving vehicles pass — automobiles and trucks. In the centre the surface car clangs its course, while overhead runs the elevated road, adding an intermittent din to the manifold and prevailing noises. Above the stores, on either side of the way, flat rises above flat — the homes of the small tradesmen and their smaller assistants. Each block or two forms a little community to itself and has its loves and jealousies, its envyings and friendships, with as unfailing certainty as do more pretentious circles of society. Perhaps these things are here even stronger and more developed, since human nature, like vegetation, flourishes best in virgin soil.

In one of these numerous blocks, in a fourth-floor flat, lived Mrs. Halligan, with her son and daughter. She was wont to say with pride, "I am eleven years in this same place," and she told many a tale to her gossip, Mrs. Zukerman, of "Zukerman's Bakery and Lunch-

<sup>1</sup> *Father Bernard's Parish*, Florence Olmstead. Scribner.



Room" next door, of "how lovely the house used to be kep', with carpets on the stair."

**The dramatic method.** — There is another reason why Mrs. Halligan should hold the stage. She is in the story and of it; the writer is outside. And why should any one outside the world of the story be brought in to describe, to interpret, to explain? Why should not the story itself be all-sufficient? It can get itself told adequately in itself and through itself. It needs no showman. The intrusion of the writer is often accompanied by a running commentary on the story, its scenes and its people, which most readers find impertinent in every sense of the word — out of place and presumptuous. The case against any method of telling the story except through the material of the story itself is put thus by Mr. Percy Lubbock<sup>1</sup> in *The Craft of Fiction*:

The simple story-teller begins by addressing himself openly to the reader, and then exchanges this method for another and another, and with each modification he reaches the reader from a further remove. The more circuitous procedure on the part of the author produces a straighter effect for the reader; that is why, other things being equal, the more dramatic way is better than the less. It is indirect, as a method; but it places the thing itself in view, instead of recalling and reflecting and picturing it. . . . In the first place he [the author] wishes the story so far as possible to speak for itself, the people and the action to appear independently rather than to be described and explained. To this end the method is raised to the highest dramatic power that the subject allows, until at last, perhaps, it is found that nothing need be explained at all; there need be no revelation of anybody's thought, no going behind any of the appearance on the surface of the action; even the necessary description . . . may be so treated that this too gains the value of drama.

<sup>1</sup> *The Craft of Fiction*, Percy Lubbock. Scribner.

## CHAPTER V

### WRITING THE FIRST CHAPTER

**First chapter of an autobiographical novel.** — You will have noticed that we have been speaking of our description as a story or as part of a story. I think that we shall find this a helpful way of regarding our writing. We may set down our experiences as though we were writing the beginning of an autobiographical novel. And as this sort of novel may be said to be to-day one of the most popular vehicles for a writer's impressions of life, and as he is usually at some pains to open it with pages, sometimes chapters, of just the kind of writing that we have in mind for ourselves, we shall not have the feeling that what we write is in the nature of an exercise only, a discipline — it is, in its way, literature; and if it is written sincerely it will be read with attention and respect. It is in this manner that Mr. Walpole begins *The Green Mirror*, with the neighborhood and the house of the Trenchards. The first five chapters of a recent novel<sup>1</sup> are given to a most thorough and detailed presentation of the environment of the heroine, — the shops where she buys food, the suburb where she lives, her house — its kitchen, a bedroom. And the reader gains it all in the way we have been recommending, through the alert senses of Celia herself. It begins:

The curb lay beneath the toes of her shoes. Celia stared at it, and recognizing that Dean Street had now ended and that Lavender Road was sliding away on the other side of Wykeham Rise, she lifted her head, shot to left and right a glance which noted traffic, and then

<sup>1</sup> *Ten Hours*, Constance I. Smith. Harcourt, Brace.

crossed alertly, conscious again for a few minutes of the things stationary and moving which filled the gray morning light. 'Buses, cars, people, shops — they all drew near and she surveyed them. Then her wide blue eyes dropped. Walking briskly and buoyantly, she looked only at the surface of pavement immediately before her.

She saw the lines of brown earth between the paving-stones; she saw innumerable legs wagging in front and beside her; masculine legs in yellow gaiters, or baggy or tight, or light or dark, trousers; and feminine legs under a flop of skirt. Gusts of tobacco smoke and petroleum came to her nostrils; sharp sounds cut her ears; once or twice she sniffed, and all the time she hummed, not because she was happy; not for any reason at all but quite unconsciously. . . .

Lavender Road, at no time sluggish, was always crowded on Saturdays. Along its right-hand side where she was standing, stalls were set. You could hardly move, so many were the people looking at them, and at the shops, and coming and going up the strip of pavement between.

Celia's mind ticked off comments. Those apples looked good; cheap, too, if they got them from the front, and not from the back where they had a different kind altogether. Still, you could get right out into the street and stand behind the stall; people did. You had to be sharp, or they'd fob any old stuff off on you. Pah! how the fish smelt! How could people buy fish off stalls! . . .

**The third person.** — You may have noticed, too, that, of all the descriptions which we have considered, only one uses the *I* of the first person narrative. In Mr. Aldington's lines it is *I* — "I hate the town I lived in when I was little" — but in all the other passages it is Angelina, or Jennie, or Celia, or Susan, or some other. That *I* is a difficult little word to handle. It has a way of obtruding itself uncomfortably upon the attention of both writer and reader. Even in a piece of writing to which he gave the title, "An Autobiographic Chapter,"<sup>1</sup> Randolph Bourne did not use the awkward *I* but talked of himself as Gilbert. "Gilbert," he began, "was almost six years old when they all — Mother, Olga, and baby — went to live with Garna

<sup>1</sup> "An Autobiographic Chapter," Randolph Bourne. *Dial*, January, 1920.



in her tall white house.” And he went on with “Gilbert would stand on a chair and see dimly through rain-streaming panes” and “Gilbert would come in from the garden into the fragrant kitchen on baking-day to look for cookies,” and so on.

In the paper that follows, Ann does for the student writer<sup>1</sup> and her readers what Gilbert does for Randolph Bourne:

Ann gazed affectionately up the short street which had been her home. There were Shapiro’s Poultry Market and Eidus’s Fancy Grocery and Dairy. No one was sitting on the rickety old bread boxes near the curb, and the worn green shades of both stores were drawn. She guessed that this deserted appearance must be due to one of the Jewish holy days, and she recalled with a chuckle how angry the Italian women on Beaufort Avenue used to be when Eidus would not break his holy day to sell them even so important a thing as milk or poppy-seed buns for their husband’s breakfast, or a quarter of a pound of butter for their evening meal. She wondered whether the same faded blue and green and orange advertising cards were hanging in the window; and whether the grocery still smelled of the same pungent mixture of cheese and pickles, kerosene and dried herring; and whether the same black cat still tried to snooze in the show-case by the window, and was prodded by the mischievous fingers of the little boys of the neighborhood who ran with every penny they could get to Eidus’s to exchange it for whatever candy happened to be the fashion of the hour.

There was Mr. Viola’s incongruous house with its Romanesque architecture and its rubbish-strewn space that had once been a lawn. Beside the grey stone wall that separated Viola’s yard from the trim little green and white house next door, there were stacked heaps of empty grape crates, not unconnected, perhaps, with the scent of wine which lurked in the air.

Some association of ideas made her glance across to the new house which Policeman Liggett had bought late in the spring. The house was brave now with very fancy window shades, — large red and green parrots on a yellowish white background. Even the window boxes were sportive with red paint and little cockle shells neatly placed to form a border for the bright geraniums.

<sup>1</sup> Marian E. Wilson.

The house next door, which had always reminded Ann of a shoe box set on end and neatly punctured with holes for windows and door, had not changed a bit: the high stoop was as spotlessly clean as it ever had been, the brown shutters of the parlor floor were primly closed, the tiny window in the grey door beneath the stoop was shaded by the same little ruffled curtain, freshly laundered as always. . . .

**Handling the descriptive material.** — Now we are almost ready to write our first chapter; but before we begin let us go back to the notes which represent our observation of a section near our college, and as a last bit of preparation let us get this material ready for the reader in as many different ways as we can. We need not follow any method to the end unless we like, but it would be well to pursue each of them far enough to show unmistakably how it could go on if we wished to finish it. Then let us decide which of our many approaches we find best suited to our material. Are we at a time of the year when the weather is our most helpful aid to interpretation? Do we need a person as guide? Which of the many possible reactions to the scene is the most natural, convincing, and enlightening?

After this last preliminary we may put our own home neighborhood down on paper.

**Preparation of manuscript.** — And here a few words about the preparation of manuscript will possibly be necessary. The paper commonly used is good white unlined paper,  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$  inches. Manuscript is usually presented flat, fastened with a metal clip, or, if folded, folded only once. The first page of a flat manuscript or the cover page of a folded manuscript bears the name and address (or college class) of the writer and the title of the paper. Writing, of course, should appear only on one side of the paper. Margins should be pleasantly wide, not only at the left of each page, but also at the right and at top and bottom. Paragraph indentations should be liberal enough to show the paragraphing at a glance. The paper should be

typewritten if possible. If it is written by hand, no effort should be spared to make it as legible as if it were typed. Black ink should be used; a generous space should be left between lines; each word should be written compactly without gaps between its letters; consecutive words should not be crowded together; letters and punctuation marks should be formed clearly and simply. Unless a paper is neat and legible and in good form it can scarcely expect a reading from a busy theme reader.

**Habits of work.** — Each person develops his own habits during the actual process of writing, and no general recommendations are likely to be helpful to every one. Still for the encouragement of those who find it a distasteful task to set the first words on paper, it may be said that, in a manner of speaking, there need be no first words. If the subject has been kept in mind right along, hovering on the outskirts of attention perhaps, ready to be called to the center and favored with a moment's notice whenever a leisure minute occurred, it will have been worked and reworked, twisted this way and that, until at last it settled into some form that just waited for paper and pencil to see itself in the written word. Or if, at first, in spite of the writer's preoccupation with his subject, the written word lags stubbornly behind the thought, then it may be remembered with comfort that the worker, as well as the player, usually warms up after a preliminary bout. Get to work: that is the important thing. Push the pencil doggedly across the paper, even if the words it writes are words for the wastebasket only. When you get to the end of your material and you feel that the words are coming more readily at your need for them, take advantage of the greater fluency. Go back now to the opening of your paper and try again. Perhaps there is little — perhaps there is much — in your first effort that is worth salvaging. If you have written on large sheets of paper, and have left wide



spaces between the lines, you may revise now with a minimum of rewriting. Perhaps there is nothing of your first writing that you care to preserve. Then throw it aside and go on to a fresh writing. You will do better this time. Use this period of energy and fluency to its last minute. Do not, however, think that your paper is in its final shape. Put it aside. Come to it again after an interval during which you have forgotten the pains and the ardors of composition, so that you bring to it the cool, critical eye of an outsider, of some other person who will read your paper as if for the first time, as if without any intimate knowledge of the processes through which it arrived at its present stage. Where this second self is puzzled, clarify your paper; where he is bored, prune it; where he wants more, expand it. At last go over it line by line, word by word, to be sure that it is at least correct — that it does not offend in sentence structure, grammatical agreement, spelling, punctuation. And you will not now be ashamed to sign your name to it, for it is the best that you can do at present.

## CHAPTER VI

### SINCERITY AND SIMPLICITY IN WRITING

**The goonish style.** — It is possible, if this college class is like other college classes, that among the papers that have just been written there will be found at least one that does not sound at all as though it were the work of a young person under twenty living in the first half of the twentieth century. And this will be so not because it has been written carelessly: the writer will have spared no effort to make it very fine indeed. But his way of trying to make it fine will have been to strive, not for a manner of writing that would be the natural expression of his years and his experience, not for anything that would sound like his own way of talking, but for some sort of "literary" style, demanded, he thinks, by the dignity of pen and ink and paper. This form of expression has nothing in common with everyday speech. Its words are words of length and weight. In it, two syllables are preferable to one syllable, two words to one word, and three to two.

In one of Miss Gale's stories,<sup>1</sup> Jane Mellish, who has composed the dedication to the "Katy Town First Church Ladies' Choice Receipt Book," asks, "What do you think of the dedication, ladies?"

"It's beautiful, Jane — just beautiful," Mis' Burns told her. "There couldn't no one have expressed it nicer."

"I said that when I read it over," Mis' Port added. "I said, 'She's done it, this time. Where everybody else would have used one word, Jane Mellish has used two.' We're all real proud, Jane."

<sup>1</sup> "White Bread," Zona Gale. *Harper's Monthly*, July, 1916.

There are writers more sophisticated in many ways than Jane Mellish and Mis' Port whose sense of values in this respect is no more sophisticated than theirs. They too are real proud when they pile up words to the concealment of anything they may have to tell — proud when the words are of a kind to disguise effectually the reality of their subject-matter and to hide completely whatever they may possess of genuineness of point of view or salt of personality.

Mr. Frederick L. Allen<sup>1</sup> has hit upon an epithet to brand the writing which Katy Town admires. He calls it the *goonish* style, and he defines and illustrates it with such point and wit that no one who reads "The Goon and his Style" can persist in his goonishness unless he is a wilful, defiant, incorrigible goon.

"Because the contests in which the university teams take part are attended by such keen excitement, let it not be thought by my readers that the students who play on these teams are the only ones to derive benefit from participation in athletic sports."

Here you have a perfect example of a goonish style. I admit it reluctantly, because I wrote that sentence myself in all seriousness a few days ago; but I admit it positively.

I was writing an article for a foreign periodical about the university with which I am associated. I didn't want to do the article, but I had promised to and had to. It wasn't one of those cases where the author burns to tell his readers the message that throbs in him for utterance, or anything of that sort. It was a case where the author knows he can't put it off any longer and sits down miserably and grinds it out. Furthermore, it happened in this case that the author knew the article would have to be translated, anyhow, and felt that if he cut loose and wrote in his usual dashing manner the translator would get twisted. He tried very hard to express himself plainly and impeccably. The result was, "Let it not be thought by my readers" and "derive benefit from participation in athletic sports" — sure marks of the goonish style.

A goon is a person with a heavy touch. . . .

<sup>1</sup> "The Goon and his Style," Frederick L. Allen. *Harper's Monthly*, December, 1921.



A goonish style is one that reads as if it were the work of a goon. It is thick and heavy. It suggests the sort of oatmeal served at lunch counters, lumpy and made with insufficient salt. It is to be found at its best in nature books, railroad folders, college catalogues, and prepared speeches by high public officials. It employs the words "youth" and "lad," likes the exclamation "lo!" says "one may readily perceive" instead of "you can easily see," and speaks — yes, I admit it with shame — of "deriving benefit from participation in athletic sports."

The railroad-folder variety of goonishness sees fit to tell the reader that the hotels and boarding houses along the line "vie with one another in offering amusements and recreations to delight the visitor." Lake George, described by a goonish vendor of railroad publicity as "alert with pristine life," is declared by him to be "worthy of national acceptance as the rich fulfillment of the vacation hopes of every man and woman and child. For loveliness of appearance, healthfulness of fresh mountain breezes, and varied resources of entertainment, no place can boast an advantage over this queen of American lakes."

The goonishness of nature books is usually in inverse ratio to the amount of scientific information which they contain. So long as the author is content to state facts concerning length of bill, color of fur, and number of eggs usually laid, he gives no offence; but beware of him when his facts run low and he is moved to wash down his pill of fact with a bucketful of rhetoric expressing his love of nature. "The dark swamps," he says, "are made glad by joyous, wonderful song." Or, "Never shall I forget the bright morning when I first beheld a flock of titmice. The little chaps bubbled over with merriment, and as I watched them hopping from tree to tree, their gladsome songs seemed to me indeed the veritable embodiment of the spirit of the nuptial season."

J. Fenimore Cooper was a mighty goon. . . . "We will profit by this pause in the discourse," wrote Cooper when he was warming up for a description of two of his major characters, "to give the reader some idea of the appearance of the men, both of whom are destined to enact no insignificant parts in our legend. It would not have been easy to find a more noble specimen of vigorous manhood than was offered in the person of him who called himself Hurry Harry."

When Charles Lamb and Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt were writing those essays that are still the best we have of "talking upon paper," goonishness irritated Hazlitt<sup>1</sup> into denunciation more vigorous than Mr. Allen's. He wrote:

A word may be a fine-sounding word, of an unusual length, and very imposing from its learning and novelty, and yet in the connection in which it is introduced may be quite pointless and irrelevant. It is not pomp or pretension, but the adaptation of the expression to the idea, that clenches a writer's meaning: as it is not the size or glossiness of the materials, but their being fitted each to its place, that gives strength to the arch; or as the pegs and nails are as necessary to the support of the building as the larger timbers, and more so than the mere showy, unsubstantial ornaments. I hate anything that occupies more space than it is worth. I hate to see a load of band-boxes go along the street, and I hate to see a parcel of big words without anything in them.

**The language of common speech.** — This gaudy style, Hazlitt said, is easy to write. Is it easy to write a simple, natural style? Hazlitt himself supplies the answer:

It is not easy to write a familiar style. Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style, and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random. On the contrary, there is nothing that requires more precision, and, if I may say so, purity of expression, than the style I am speaking of. It utterly rejects not only all unmeaning pomp, but all low, cant [slang] phrases, and loose, unconnected, *slipshod* allusions. It is not to take the first word that offers, but the best word in common use; it is not to throw words together in any combinations we please, but to follow and avail ourselves of the true idiom of the language. To write a genuinely familiar or truly English style is to write as any one would speak in common conversation who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes.

The last sentence tells us what should be our standard; or, if Hazlitt seems to ask of us qualities that are as yet beyond us, we

<sup>1</sup> "On Familiar Style."

may apply to our prose Mr. Drinkwater's <sup>1</sup> less exacting definition of the language that he looks for in poetry: "the speech of the intelligent and vivid, though not necessarily the most highly educated members of the community."

Mr. Drinkwater is careful to explain that his vivid and intelligent speakers are "not necessarily the most highly educated members of the community." Mr. George Moore goes further.

In his *Conversations in Ebury Street*,<sup>2</sup> he tells us that once while he was partridge-shooting with a friend in the north of England, he showed no interest in the shooting; and on his friend's asking him the reason for his inattention, he answered that he was listening to the beautiful English of the gamekeeper. His friend, shocked at Mr. Moore's attributing beautiful English to one of the social standing of a gamekeeper, exclaimed, "But is not your aim in writing to write the language of good society?" Mr. Moore cried out like a dog whose tail had been trodden on, and told him: "Not at all! My object is to separate myself as far as possible from the language spoken in good society." To explain what he meant, he drew from his pocket a coin so old that its markings were almost defaced. "This sixpence," he said, "represents the language that is spoken in society."

Mr. Joseph Hergesheimer<sup>3</sup> wrote recently that if he were young again and just beginning as an author, and could select the place for beginning, the Middle West would be his choice; and there, he continued, "I'd write in the language of the people, a language rich with local idiom, and absolutely provincial; a prose, I hope, as sweet with the scent of dried hay as it was brilliant with early wheat and bitter with death." Mr. Hergesheimer's preference is for the language of the wheatfields of

<sup>1</sup> *Victorian Poetry*, John Drinkwater. Doran.

<sup>2</sup> *Conversations in Ebury Street*, George Moore. Boni and Liveright.

<sup>3</sup> *McNaught's Monthly*, July, 1924.



the Middle West as Mr. Moore's is for the speech of the English fields and woods. Yet Mr. Drinkwater reminds us:

There is no telling at any time where exactly you are going to catch the true turn of racy or imaginative idiom, and it is as unsafe to generalize in favour of the rustic as it is to do so in favour of the tutored townsman. Good minds make good speech, and cumulatively they give the common diction of the age a character which cannot escape the poets when poetry has any health to it, which, to do it justice in looking back over five hundred years of achievement, is nearly always.

It cannot escape the prose writer either, unless, of course, the prose writer is a goon.

**Pretentious words.** — Against all "this counsel to use the language of ordinary speech," we occasionally hear a voice raised in protest. Professor Erskine<sup>1</sup> objects:

It is our duty, on the contrary, . . . to enlarge our vocabulary even beyond the words our family and our neighbors make natural to us, . . . that we may enrich and refine our style, and render our meaning more precise. The temptation to get along with a small vocabulary . . . is altogether too natural; we do not need this premeditated urging to a still greater poverty.

Is it not, however, precisely enrichment, and not poverty, that is the aim of our urging? If our vocabulary is smaller by the number of stilted, pretentious words that we drop, who will say that it has suffered any real loss? Are "peruse" and "replete" words that enrich a vocabulary? Edward Rowland Sill cites them as terms "that are never used in honest speech, and the employment of which in conversation would make a man feel absurd." Sill<sup>2</sup> is in agreement with our counsellors of common speech:

<sup>1</sup> *The Literary Discipline*, John Erskine. Bobbs-Merrill.

<sup>2</sup> *The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill*. Houghton Mifflin.

The best literature and the best conversation contrive to get on with but one vocabulary. . . . It is already merry times in literature when we are no longer afraid of our mother tongue. We instinctively sheer off from any writer who uses what Rogers ("the poet Rogers") called "album words." . . . When we find the ideas common and the words uncommon we have learned that we may as well put down the volume, or turn the leaf of the magazine.

Shall we miss from our vocabulary such words as "overt," "attire," "perpend"? Mr. Frank Swinnerton is quoted in a London literary journal (which is quoted in turn by the *New York Times*) as being distressed whenever he meets with these words "or any other pompous substitute for a common word." The London journal had asked a number of well-known writers for the "words and phrases they most detest," and it found that the majority of them hate "pedantic and uncommon diction." Mr. Thomas Burke prefers "the straight phrase to the decorative — *e.g.*, 'he got up' rather than 'he rose'; 'he went away' rather than 'he departed'; 'he knocked him about' rather than 'he inflicted severe punishment.'"

**Stale words.** — Then, too, many of the words that we are urged to discard are stale words, words already so often used, so often passed from writer to reader that Mr. Moore compares them to old coins, their markings worn with much handling until they are "almost defaced"; Hazlitt speaks of them as "tarnished, threadbare"; Sill calls them "type-metal terms." Of all these figurative epithets hurled at them so scornfully, this last finds place, in its French form, in the dictionary<sup>1</sup>:

*cliché.* An electrotpe or stereotype plate. . . . A rigid or stereotyped form of expression.

"Threadbare" as applied to words is there too, but for many of us the vividness of the figure is hidden in a word formed from

<sup>1</sup> *New Standard Dictionary of the English Language.* Funk and Wagnalls, 1917.

a Latin past participle — *trite*, from *tero*, to rub. Still another picturesque jibe — hackneyed — is in English plain enough to make us see the poor old word, like Leigh Hunt's hackney-coach horse, with "the dim indifferent eye, the dragged and blunt-cornered mouth, and the gaunt imbecility of body dropping its weight on three tired legs in order to give repose to the lame one."

When we charge a writer with using clichés, we mean that he is using words hardened by lazy repetition into set, rigid combinations which no longer have any freshness of meaning. His little cottages always "nestle"; his tall buildings always "loom." His trees "don" green "garments" in the spring and "doff" them in the fall, only again to "don garments," this time of other colors. He makes a "carpet" for the earth, in one season, of fallen leaves; in another season, of snow. But snow may be a "mantle," too, or a "robe." In his pages almost anything will act as a "sentinel" "guarding" almost anything else.

**Sincerity and simplicity of diction.** — So that we may be sure that we understand one another, it may be helpful at this point for each of us to select from his reading some passage that seems to him unmistakably an authentic experience in authentic words. Class comment will invariably expose words that fall below our standard of absolute simplicity and sincerity. No "album words" will survive the test of being spoken before a group of people who have a reasonably keen sense of the ridiculous. For my example, Mr. Robert Frost's "The Mountain"<sup>1</sup> may serve. It begins:

The mountain held the town as in a shadow  
I saw so much before I slept there once:  
I noticed that I missed stars in the west,  
Where its black body cut into the sky.

<sup>1</sup> *North of Boston*, Robert Frost. Henry Holt.



Near me it seemed: I felt it like a wall  
Behind which I was sheltered from a wind.  
And yet between the town and it I found,  
When I walked forth at dawn to see new things,  
Were fields, a river, and beyond, more fields.  
The river at the time was fallen away,  
And made a widespread brawl on cobble-stones;  
But the signs showed what it had done in spring;  
Good grass-land gullied out, and in the grass  
Ridges of sand, and driftwood stripped of bark.  
I crossed the river and swung round the mountain.  
And there I met a man who moved so slow  
With white-faced oxen in a heavy cart,  
It seemed no harm to stop him altogether.

I must admit that, in following this direction, a member <sup>1</sup> of one of my classes "rose to the defense," as she put it, of the dear, familiar phrases, but I have so little fear that you will take her too seriously that I am giving you her arguments in their favor:

Since I have arrived at the point where I no longer need a collection of stock expressions as a literary rod and staff, I may with safety enter upon a defense of those expressions which professors of English are wont to label "trite" in bold blue crayon. Such a defense will doubtless appeal to harassed freshmen of limited vocabulary, the victims of this diabolical practice of literary censorship, and it will at the same time afford me an outlet for some long-accumulated exasperation.

Nothing in my college career ever occasioned in me quite the same sense of annoyance that I felt whenever an instructor marked as "trite" a word or phrase which I had chosen with forethought and loving care. For I used these expressions out of a fondness for them — here my good taste will naturally be called into question — and not because of necessity or laziness. . . . The fact that I made more or less frequent use of phrases like "the sentinel trees stood on the cliff" or "the ground was carpeted with leaves," was not an indication of any poverty of expression on my part, as some well-meaning professors would have had me believe; it was rather the

<sup>1</sup> "I Rise to the Defense," Elsie Hoertel Parry. Hunter College *Echo*.

shameless confession of a liking for those outcasts from high literary society, whose only fault is a too great popularity.

This partiality of mine for trite expressions is but another manifestation of my fondness for the dear, familiar commonplace things of life. It is my reaction from the highly individualistic tendencies of the age. To come upon one of these treasured expressions in the course of my reading is like seeing the face of an old friend in a crowd of strangers. It always calls to my mind the same familiar image. And when in turn I wish to convey that image to another, what better medium is there than the touchstone of a well-known expression? . . .

But if my taste is still open to criticism even after this explanation, I at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I am in good company. Here is John Burroughs, who, in the space of one essay, is bold enough to use the expression "carpeted with pine needles" twice; in another — horror of horrors — he says that "Nature seems to smile upon the old farm house," thereby committing a double offense. And as for Walter Prichard Eaton — I am afraid that he must dwell forever outside the pale of good literary society if his essays are to be judged solely by the number of trite expressions found in them. In "Green Trails and Upland Pastures" Mr. Eaton uses variations of "the trees stood like sentinels" no less than six times. In the same volume he also uses that favorite victim of the blue pencil, "the song-sparrows and the robins were heralding the spring," and Hamlin Garland in "Other Main-Travelled Roads" bears him company with "an occasional flock of geese, cheerful harbingers of spring." Again Mr. Eaton, and with him John Burroughs, offends the fastidious taste by saying that "the world was bathed in sunshine." . . .

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCRETE AND COMPACT WRITING

**Second chapter of the autobiographical novel.** — We began our novel with a description of a neighborhood. In *Ten Hours* Miss Smith, even before she describes the house where her Celia lives, describes the shops and the stalls where she buys food. You probably remember that Dr. Crothers's four-year-old Philosopher found the grocer's an enchanted country. Two of the most delightful of Leigh Hunt's essays are "Of the Sight of Shops." He cannot bear the horribly neat monotony of the stationer's shelves "with their slates and slate pencils that set one's teeth on edge," but he feels himself still a little boy when he stands before the window of the toy-shop with its

balls which possess the additional zest of the danger of breaking people's windows; — ropes, good for swinging and skipping, especially the long ones which others turn for you, while you run in a masterly manner up and down, or skip in one spot with an easy and endless exactitude of toe, looking alternately at their conscious faces; — blood-allies, with which the possessor of a crisp finger and thumb-knuckle causes the smitten marbles to vanish out of the ring; — . . . Lilliputian plates, dishes, and other household utensils, in which a grand dinner is served up out of half an apple; — boxes of paints, to colour engravings with, always beyond the outline; — . . . sheets of pictures, from A apple-pie up to farming, military, and zoological exhibitions, always taking care that the Fly is as large as the Elephant, and the letter X exclusively appropriated to Xerxes. . . .

At the pastry-cook's he remembers "the pleasure of nibbling away the crust all round a raspberry or currant tart, in order to enjoy the three or four delicious semicircular bites at the fruity



plenitude remaining." The fruiterer's he finds an excellent shop:

Here are the round piled-up oranges, deepening almost into red, and heavy with juice; the apple, with its brown red cheek, as if it had slept in the sun; the pear, swelling downwards; thronging grapes, like so many tight little bags of wine; the peach, whose handsome leathern coat strips off so finely; the pearly or rubylike currants, heaped in light long baskets; the red little mouthful of strawberries; the larger purple ones of plums. . . .

Amy Lowell<sup>1</sup> too loved a fruit shop:

He pointed to baskets of blunted pears  
With the thin skin tight like a bursting vest,  
All yellow, and red, and brown, in smears.

. . . . .

He took up a pear with tender care,  
And pressed it with his hardened thumb.  
"Smell it, Mademoiselle, the perfume there  
Is like lavender, and sweet thoughts come  
Only from having a dish at home.  
And those grapes! They melt in the mouth like wine,  
Just a click of the tongue, and they burst to honey."

. . . . .

He went to a pan  
And poured upon the counter a flood  
Of pungent raspberries, tangled like wood.  
He took a melon with rough green rind  
And rubbed it well with his apron tip.  
Then he hunted over the shop to find  
Some walnuts cracking at the lip,  
And added to these a barberry slip  
Whose acrid, oval berries hung  
Like fringe and trembled.

And we shall find shops fruitful subjects for description, even those that are not fruit shops — it must be the nearness of

<sup>1</sup> *Men, Women and Ghosts*, Amy Lowell. Houghton Mifflin.

Leigh Hunt, shameless punster like his friend Charles Lamb, that encourages the pun — but shops where vegetables are sold, and groceries, and bread and cake, delicatessen, even fish, although Celia of *Ten Hours* rather turns up her nose at it.

**Adequate material.** — As we prepare to write this, the second chapter of our novel, we shall want to do at least as well with it as we did with our first chapter. We shall see to it that eyes, ears, nose, palate, finger-tips take in enough material. A Columbia professor used to tell — perhaps he still tells — of a student who walked along Broadway from Seventy-second Street to One Hundred Sixteenth Street, going into each delicatessen store and asking for something that no delicatessen store would be likely to have, in order to collect a rich store of sense impressions. For most of us, one delicatessen store — one store of any kind — will probably be enough.

**The most helpful method.** — Then, with our memories and our notebooks packed, we shall write. Here again, as in our first chapter, we shall find it helpful to get our description before the reader through the agency of some one in the story. Miss Lowell's fruiterer points to his pears and grapes, not only for Mademoiselle, but also for the reader. One student writer has a Betty who goes marketing as much for those of us who read the paper as for herself:

Betty loved the rattle of the crisp paper and the gentle thud of the packages of breakfast food as they tumbled into Mr. Smitcher's outstretched hands, coaxed down from their shelves by a queer little grasping pair of iron fingers on a long stick. Surely the hands of the clock hadn't moved since she had been waiting, and the pendulum was swinging very slowly as if it were afraid to tick lest Mrs. Crowley, whose complaining voice filled the store, should accuse it of "impudence and *such* impudence," as she was now accusing the wide-eyed, frightened-looking clerk. Even the grumble and bang of the traffic outside could not drown her querulous words.

It occurred to Betty that she would have a while to wait until

Mrs. Crowley had spoken her mind; so she leaned against the snowy counter which supported the sparkling dishes and bowls containing "things to take out." The most delicious odor of fish and coffee and varnish and pickles and sauerkraut came to her nostrils. She sniffed excitedly, like a little dog, and picked up all sorts of interesting smells broadcast by the huge cheeses, the fat sides of bacon, and — o-o-o-h — what was that lovely smell? She drew a deep breath and looked around. Oh, yes! there were the neatly cut, neatly tied, neatly piled bundles of firewood, still moist from their night in the woodshed and giving off the most fragrant smell, like the one that came into her bedroom window at night from the new shingles on the house that was being built next door. . . .<sup>1</sup>

**Creative Language.** — In this second description of ours we shall be sure, too, to keep to simple words: to use pretentious words about a delicatessen store or a vegetable market would be worse than

To gild refined gold, to paint the lily;

it would be to gild the cabbage and to paint the cauliflower. We must, however, ask more of our words than that they be natural to us and appropriate to our subject. If these words are to make our readers see and hear and smell and taste, they must be words that give the very sight and sound and smell and taste; they must give the thing itself as nearly as words can; they must be, as Walter Pater says, "that sort of creative language which carries the reality of what it depicts, directly, to the consciousness." Mr. Murry, in his *Problem of Style*,<sup>2</sup> quotes Tchekhov's praise of Gorky — "When you describe a thing, you see and touch it with your hands. That is real writing" — and his advice to another friend: "Cut out all those pages about the moonlight. Give us what you feel — the reflection of the moon in a piece of broken bottle." Mr. Murry tells us:

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Jones.

<sup>2</sup> *The Problem of Style*, J. Middleton Murry. Oxford University Press.



Dostoevsky said to a writer who had described the throwing of pennies to an organ man in the street below, "I want to hear that penny hopping and chinking."

**Concrete, specific words.** — Those "pages about the moonlight" must have been abstract where they should have been concrete, general where they should have been specific. In descriptive writing there is no place for this sort of moonshine. We do not find it in any description that succeeds in carrying over to the reader the sense impressions of the writer. It is not about *fruits* that Leigh Hunt and Amy Lowell wrote, but about *round piled-up oranges, deepening almost into red* or about *a melon with rough green rind*. A student writes not in general about *candy*, but specifically about *chocolate fudge evenly cut into prim squares, fat sugary dates, buttery yellow popcorn*; not about *cakes*, but about *jelly rolls with red spirals of filling* and a *tray of drop cakes like little mountains set on a plain*. The little shop in the following description<sup>1</sup> is not merely *narrow*: it is *so narrow that Rose could barely pass without jostling Mrs. Fein*. It does, it is true, contain *an endless variety of goods*, but this abstract *variety* is at once resolved into concrete *cans and bottles*.

Rose came into Neckowitz's store just in time to hear Mrs. Fein say to Mrs. Neckowitz, "A good *schmolz* herring, please."

"They're all good," said Mrs. Neckowitz, and she put her hand deep down into a barrel and pulled up by the tail a long fat herring, dripping with oil. She held it up in the air for a few seconds, and then wrapped it in one of the newspapers stacked on the counter alongside the mahogany-colored cash register.

Neckowitz's store was so narrow that Rose could barely pass without jostling Mrs. Fein. Yet the store contained an endless variety of goods. On three walls, almost reaching to the ceiling, were shelves upon shelves of cans and bottles in brilliant red, blue, green, and yellow labels. And as the light came in through the

<sup>1</sup> Anna Paisner.

window, it caught the tin rims of the cans, and the silver-colored metal tops of the red ketchup bottles, and the gilt metal tops of the brown mustard jars, and made them glitter.

It was, however, the food that Rose could smell that interested her and made her mouth water. Rose could smell Mrs. Neckowitz's home-made pickled herrings. They were in a large white bowl, — many slices of them soaked in vinegar together with little pieces of onion and red pepper, spices and cloves. When you asked for ten cents' worth, Mrs. Neckowitz picked up three slices with a large wooden spoon, put them in a little wooden platter, and poured a spoonful of vinegar over them. Beside the pickled herrings there was a bowl of dill pickles, another bowl of black olives, another of pickled red peppers, and another of pickled green tomatoes.

On a blue and white oilcloth in the store window was a chunk of smoked salmon, brilliantly pink and oozing with fat, and next to it a piece of smoked carp, and next to the carp, stacked in rows, yellow smoked whitefish, glistening like metal.

"Yes, ma'am, what can I do for you?" Mrs. Neckowitz turned to Rose.

"A good *schmolz* herring, please," said Rose.

"They're all good," said Mrs. Neckowitz, and she bent over the herring barrel, pulled up a herring by the tail, held it up in the air for a few seconds, and then wrapped it in a newspaper.

**Concrete, specific words.** — Dostoevsky asked for words that would make him "hear that penny hopping and chinking." It is, perhaps, not particularly difficult to make the reader hear. The language is rich in "hopping and chinking" words. With little effort we can compile long lists of such sound words as

*boom, beat, bang, buzz, blare, chatter, clatter, crackle, click, crash, creak, clang, crunch, drip, drum, grind, gush, hiss, jingle, patter, plop, pop, purr, rumble, roar, rattle, rustle, sizzle, splash, shuffle, scrape, slam, smash, sniff, squeak, squeal, swirl, swish, seethe, slap, thump, tinkle, thunder, tap, whir, whack, whistle, wheeze.*

We shall find it a helpful exercise to compile our own lists of words of sound, and similar lists of words of smell, words of

warmth and cold, words of color, words of light and shade. We may range through the books that we are reading and jot down, in each of these categories and in others, words that seem to us admirably concrete and specific.

Then after we have written the first rough draft of our chapter, let us examine the words in it to be sure that they put a clear picture before the eyes of the reader, and make him smell and hear and taste — in a word, make him share our perceptions of the shop through the medium of our concrete, specific words.

**Economy in the use of words.** — Every word that we have set on paper we must scrutinize to see that it renders the utmost descriptive value for the space it occupies. For if we admit words that are empty of descriptive significance, we lower the level of expressiveness for the whole passage. It is not only that these words fail themselves to hold the reader's interest; the whole passage suffers from the lowered tension. These words, flat and dull and lifeless themselves, rob the sentences about them of animation; they muffle the sound; they blur the outline; they take the keenness from every sense impression. Somewhere Theodore Roosevelt spoke of "weasel words," words that suck the meaning out of other words as a weasel sucks an egg, leaving only a worthless shell. For the descriptive writer such "weasel words" are *seemed*, *appeared*, *appeared to be*, and the like. They are cowardly words, words without the courage of their convictions, because what a thing *seems to be* to the senses, it *is* so far as the senses are concerned — and our only concern now is with the senses. Other timid, fumbling usages are the passive *could be seen*, *could be heard*, and the impersonal *one could see*, *one could hear*. *Betty saw*, *Betty heard* are active and direct. Compare

I saw through the bleary window  
A mass of playthings:  
False-faces hung on strings,



Tops of scarlet and green,  
 Candy, marbles, jacks . . .  
 With covetous eyes I looked again at the marbles,  
 The precious agates, the pee-wees, the chinies. . . .<sup>1</sup>

with

There could be seen through the bleary window

or

One could see through the bleary window.

In some passages, of course, the sound itself, the sight itself suffices, and there is further economy:

The electric clock jerks every half-minute:  
 "Coming! — Past!"

A spoon falls upon the floor with the impact of metal striking stone,  
 And the sound throws across the room  
 Sharp, invisible zigzags  
 Of silver.<sup>2</sup>

If we revise our paper in this manner we shall have a style both concrete and compact. We shall be on the road toward the goal which Joseph Conrad set for himself:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, above all, to make you *see*. That — and no more, and it is everything.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Lighted Window" in *Rivers to the Sea*, Sara Teasdale. Macmillan.

<sup>2</sup> "Thompson's Lunch Room" in *Men, Women and Ghosts*, Amy Lowell. Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>3</sup> *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Joseph Conrad. Doubleday, Page.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BUILDING THE SENTENCE

**Constructing the descriptive sentence.** — We have been considering words almost as though they were separate blocks with which we were to build our structure of description. We have been trying to choose only solid, substantial blocks and to pack them together close, with a minimum of cement. Now often when we find ourselves fumbling clumsily with many words instead of building cleanly with few, saying badly in twenty words what could be said better in ten, it is really because of some difficulty of construction; it is less a matter of choice of words than a matter of sentence structure. Particularly in descriptive writing, where there are many details to be worked in somehow, do we puzzle over how to combine these details and work them into our pattern of sentence and paragraph with the least possible waste of words. Take the description of a room. There seems to be no end to the details that must be crowded into it. How shall we manage so that the words that are necessary to bind the details into grammatical wholes do not clutter up the passage and obscure the description?

**Dramatic method.** — In this difficulty we shall again find an answer by letting the description carry itself along with the help of some one in it. In the following passage notice how Mr. Walpole<sup>1</sup> leads the reader through a nursery packed with things by letting him watch it with Jeremy:

<sup>1</sup> *Jeremy*, Hugh Walpole. Doran.

He watched the breakfast-table with increasing satisfaction — the large teapot with the red roses, the dark blue porridge plates, the glass jar with the marmalade a rich yellow inside it, the huge loaf with the soft pieces bursting out between the crusty pieces, the solid square of butter, so beautiful a colour and marked with a large cow and a tree on the top (he had seen once in the kitchen the wooden shape with which the cook made this handsome thing). There were also his silver mug, given him at his christening by Canon Trenchard, his godfather, and his silver spoon, given him on the same occasion by Uncle Samuel. All these things glittered and glowed in the firelight, and a kettle was singing on the hob and Martha the canary was singing in her cage in the window. (No one really knew whether the canary were a lady or a gentleman, but the name had been Martha after a beloved housemaid, now married to the gardener, and the sex had followed the name.)

There were also all the other familiar nursery things. The hole in the Turkey carpet near the bookcase, the rocking-horse, very shiny where you sit and very Christmas-tree-like as to its tail; the doll's house, now deserted, because Helen was too old and Mary too clever; the pictures of "Church on Christmas Morning" (everyone with their mouths very wide open, singing a Christmas hymn, with holly), "Dignity and Impudence," after Landseer, "The Shepherds and the Angels," and "The Charge of the Light Brigade." So packed was the nursery with history for Jeremy that it would have taken quite a week to relate it all. There was the spot where he had bitten the Jampot's fingers, for which deed he had afterwards been slippered by his father; there the corner where they stood for punishment (he knew exactly how many ships with sails, how many ridges of waves, and how many setting suns there were on that especial piece of corner wallpaper — three ships, twelve ridges, two and a half suns); there was the place where he had broken the ink-bottle over his shoes and the carpet, there by the window, where Mary had read to him once when he had toothache, and he had not known whether her reading or the toothache agonised him the more; and so on, an endless sequence of sensational history.

**Parallelism and variety.** — Now if Mr. Walpole is to be of the greatest possible assistance to us in our own writing, we must not let him go leaving with us only a general impression



of the charm of his descriptive writing: we must try to extract from him the secret of the ease with which he manages details that an unpracticed hand might have strung out in bewildering and tiring sequences. We must examine his method closely, not shrinking even from setting down our findings in terms of syntax. If we thus curiously dissect Jeremy's delightful nursery, we notice many combinations of details held together by the same grammatical structure. Jeremy *watched*, and his watching dominates detail after detail of a long compound object — teapot, porridge plates, marmalade jar, loaf of bread, square of butter. All these are, of course, in the same grammatical construction; but, in order that they shall not weary us with their sameness, Mr. Walpole has varied them by his use of different modifiers — adjectives, some before their nouns and some after them; phrases, some prepositional and some participial; even a whole parenthetical sentence, inserted casually and conversationally. Then, instead of continuing with objects of *watched*, he breaks the sequence before we tire of it; he begins a new sentence with the words, merely transitional, *there were also*, and for the rest of the paragraph we have no combination longer than the grouping of the mug and the spoon, a delayed compound subject, its grammatical identity emphasized by the repetition of the adjective modifier *silver* and by the phrase modifiers *given him at his christening by Canon Trenchard, his godfather* and *given him on the same occasion by Uncle Samuel* — also identical in construction and in word order and almost identical in length.

When we reach the second paragraph, we are at once launched upon a series of similar constructions, which extend, with little interruption and with little variation, to the end of the fairly long paragraph. Again the series begins with the words, useful only as connective tissue, *there were also*; and in a more conservative handling of sentence structure we should have after

the word *things* a colon or a comma and a dash, and after that would come the long catalogue of words in the same construction, words all in apposition with *things*: the hole in the carpet, the rocking-horse, the doll's house, the pictures. These words are variously modified, as were the words in the first series. Again the long series has within it minor groupings approximately parallel — *very shiny where you sit* and *very Christmas-tree-like as to its tail*; because Helen was *too old* and Mary *too clever*. And again there is a highly conversational change of accent in the parenthetical *everyone with their mouths very wide open, singing a Christmas hymn, with holly*, so that the rhythm of the parallel members shall not become too pronounced for the informality of the subject and the treatment. After a brief interruption this first series is practically continued in a second series with a slightly longer rhythm and a slightly different grammatical structure. The *there* is now not the expletive used before, but an adverb of place followed, not by subjects modified for the most part by adjectives and phrases, but by subjects each modified this time by a clause, each clause introduced by the same word, *where* — *the spot where, the corner where, the place where*. And here again we have the conversational accent of the parenthetical sentence.

Out of this examination emerge certain principles of sentence construction. A writer, we learn, may impart rhythm and movement to any number of details by following a certain pattern of sentence structure, and yet that pattern, to be saved from monotony, must be varied within itself. As Stevenson<sup>1</sup> puts it, “. . . we are led to foresee, to expect, and then to welcome the successive phrases,” but “the balance” may not be “too striking and exact, for the one rule is to be infinitely various; to interest, to disappoint, to surprise, and yet still to gratify;

<sup>1</sup> *On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature*, Robert Louis Stevenson. Scribner.

to be ever changing, as it were, the stitch, and yet still to give the effect of an ingenious neatness." The reader unconsciously falls into the rhythm of the writer, and on that rhythm he is carried from sentence to sentence with a feeling of ease and certainty. Yet he must not be lulled into complete repose: an occasional shock, if it is pleasant and not jarring, is good for him.

**Movement in description.** — In the opening pages of *The Green Mirror*,<sup>1</sup> after Mr. Walpole has described Rundle Square and the old house, No. 5, he goes indoors and lets us share the drawing-room with young Henry Trenchard. Here he gives life to his rhythm scheme by using verbs with more action in them than there was in Jeremy's *watching*: Henry had *wailed* before the room's old wall paper; he had *sprawled* upon the old carpet; he had *begged to be allowed to play* with the collection of knickknacks in the glass-topped table.

Inside the house at about half-past four, upon this afternoon November 8th, in the year 1902, young Henry Trenchard was sitting alone; he was straining his eyes over a book that interested him so deeply that he could not leave it in order to switch on the electric light; his long nose stuck into the book's very heart and his eyelashes almost brushed the paper. The drawing-room where he was had caught some of the fog and kept it, and Henry Trenchard's only light was the fading glow of a red cavernous fire. Henry Trenchard, now nineteen years of age, had known, in all those nineteen years, no change in that old drawing-room. As an ugly and tiresome baby he had wailed before the sombre indifference of that same old stiff green wall-paper — a little brighter then perhaps, — had sprawled upon the same old green carpet, had begged to be allowed to play with the same collection of little scent bottles and stones and rings and miniatures that lay now, in the same decent symmetry, in the same narrow glass-topped table over by the window. It was by shape and design a heavy room, slipping into its true spirit with the London dusk, the London fog, the London lamp-lit winter afternoon, seeming awkward, stiff, almost affronted before the sunshine and summer weather. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *The Green Mirror*, Hugh Walpole. Doran.



This illusion of life may be extended to almost an entire description. Miss Parrish<sup>1</sup> does it in her Harper Prize Novel, *The Perennial Bachelor*:

. . . She loved her parlor, almost as much as her conservatory. Each fat chair was a friend, the sofa was a lover who said to her, "Come, lie in my arms." To walk on the carpet was to walk on crimson roses. Between looped-back crimson window-curtains hung cages of canaries and love-birds that she had tamed with the endless patience of indolence combined with a sweet nature, and taught to perch on her shoulder and peck at lumps of sugar held between her lips. Under the cages green iron plant-stands held geraniums soft as butterfly wings, their velvet leaves banded with chocolate color, growing in pots covered with putty into which she had pressed acorns and little pine-cones. She had crocheted the blue and green and scarlet worsted covers for the goose-egg baskets in the windows, each holding a little bunch of flowers or a feather of fern; she had made the wax pond lilies floating on their mirror pools under glass shades. And even a picture hanging on the wall was hers — a castle on a lake, with mountains and cloud for background. The sky and water were painted; and the mountains were of gray sand; the rocks, of red sand; and a road, of yellow sand, sprinkled on glue. The castle was made of white birch-bark, with its dark reddish lining used for the parts in shadow, and the windows and doors painted in with ivory black; and, springing from the moss of the foreground, were trees — bits of untwisted rope with the strands divided at the top to make the limbs. . . .

Although the parallelism here is not so marked as in Mr. Walpole's descriptions and the sentences will not repay so close an examination, there is a pleasant movement running through the passage, carried from sentence to sentence either by the outstanding verb or verbal form, which always gives the same impression of action, as *to walk*, *hung*, *held* — even *loved* has this effect — or by the more striking similarity of the verbs in the past perfect tense, *had tamed* . . . *and taught*, *had pressed*, *reaching*, in one sentence, an almost perfect balance, although

<sup>1</sup> *The Perennial Bachelor*, Anne Parrish. Harper.

the grammatical parallelism — *she had crocheted; she had made* — is not reënforced by exact symmetry in the form or length of the modifiers.

**Structure of the descriptive sentence.** — Students gain a great deal from a careful study of sentence building in descriptive writing. It is interesting to note other problems besides those which we have been considering — the length of sentence in any passage, whether even or showing marked variation; the type of sentence, whether any one type prevails — simple, complex, or compound; the openings of sentences, whether the words at the beginning serve to connect sentence with sentence; the endings, whether vigorous or trailing; the rhetorical form of sentence, whether loose or periodic, and, if prevailingly loose, as it is almost certain to be, whether giving an impression of being at least partly periodic by a distribution of phrase and clause away from the end of the sentence or by the use of correlatives and other words that tend to suspend the sense until late in the sentence. The main objects of our analysis, however, will be the swing of the sentences; their compactness; their parallelism or balance. This matter of balance we shall study especially, noting whether there is an exact balance of word with word, or whether the balance is more a matter of general effect than of exact form; whether parallelism is stressed by repetition; whether the conversational tone of informal prose is preserved by breaking the parallelism before it sets too regular a pattern. If each member of a class is reasonably discriminating in his choice of a passage for analysis and if he fully illustrates with quotation the report in which he sets forth the results of his investigation, the class should at once see the effect of this study in the gain of their own sentences in compactness and symmetry.

**Third chapter.** — Let them now add to their novels the description of one or more rooms, as Miss Smith does at the



beginning of *Ten Hours* or as they have seen Mr. Walpole do in the early chapters of *The Green Mirror*. In following this assignment the students whose work appears below have evidently tried to have their description carried by the swing of movement, the second with more obvious recourse to parallelism than the first.

So it was the downstairs dining-room for once! What a relief to set the table there. Big Anna sighed gustily. Upstairs in the company dining-room it was strange and stiff and she had to be on her guard all the time. Sometimes it was the funny little rugs to trip over; sometimes it was the brass grating around the fireplace to get her feet all tangled up in. Upstairs there was delicate china that you could see through, and a glass-topped table, and a big plush-lined box of knives and forks and spoons, — enough to puzzle the smartest American. Besides she had fat, slippery rolls to wrap up in the starched napkins, and thin glasses to shine. Oh, how she hated company! It only meant fuss and plenty of chance to make a *dumkopf* of herself. But downstairs, now, with only the family, it was altogether different. Anna glowed at her mistress and the children, seven of them — knock wood — waiting impatiently in their places for the head of the family to finish washing up.

Ach! This was what she called a nice room. The painted walls were a cheerful red. The woodwork she herself had polished with a new evil-smelling oil until it shone in the glare of the two big electric lights. That was how she liked it — bright and lively. The chairs were just plain black leather and oak, but they were strong and when she had dusted them they looked fine. The children could bounce on them, but upstairs they had to sit still like so many little images. And didn't the sideboard fix the room up! It was long and heavy, with round brass knobs and queer faces of gnomes carved out of the wood. Their round oak cheeks glowed because she had rubbed them with the new polish. The lace tidy was not so new — there were little tears in the fancy border — but it was snowy white and, anyway, the three cutglass bowls hid the holes. And what about that big figure on the top? The oldest boy had told her it was Shake——Shakes——. Well, she couldn't remember the name, but wasn't it a fine statue?

You could believe her — it was a good enough place for the grandest



people to eat in. The table was long and wide, and under its white damask it was covered with a brand new oilcloth. She could smell it now, fresh and a little oily — like the hardware store where she had been sent to buy it. The curtains, too, just from the laundry, smelled clean. They were white and stiff like the starched skirts she had worn when she went to church in Munich. They even crackled and swished in the same way when the warm gusts from the window made them blow out. Neither was the china closet so bad with its glass shelves and its collection of tiny ivory figures, delicate wine-glasses, fancy candy-boxes, and one or two fans. Only the bookcase was ugly. There were little books and big books, thick books and thin books, with the untidy pages of pamphlets sticking out between them. All colors they were. Why did they need so many anyway? Anna's broad lips pursed scornfully.

Ah, here was the master. And now she would bring in the big deep soup tureen with the good thick mushroom soup. From the kitchen her greedy nostrils caught the warm odor of meat roasted with just a *kleines* bit of garlic, of baked apples oozing with sugary syrup. Her red hands deftly passed the thick gold-rimmed plates, piled high with chopped liver and onions. She shifted the huge bread-dish to make room for the round little jug of red horse-radish; she refilled the glass with celery; she poured water into the emptied tumblers, the chunks of ice clinking against the sides of the pitcher.

Well, she was tired. But they had nearly finished — the family. Now she could bring in the tea — deep thick cups, and a glass for the master. Also she must not forget the cake cook had just baked — a warm spongy ginger-loaf filled with crisp half-almonds and wet sweet raisins. Her arms on her enormous hips, Anna listened with satisfaction to the gulps and smacks of the children. . . . It was about time they were through. . . .

Anna began to clear the dishes from the table. She set the chairs<sup>1</sup> against the wall and closed the big double doors after the last retreating diner. Her ample bosom was stirred by a sigh as she scraped the cloth. She got tired down here, yes, but upstairs it was still worse. In the downstairs dining-room she was comfortable at least.<sup>1</sup>

I wasn't the first young Carmody to enjoy my uncle's kitchen in the old home in County Kerry, Ireland; five or six generations of us, before me, had hung over its stout half-door or tumbled past it into

<sup>1</sup> "The Downstairs Dining-Room," Hilda Ginsburg.

the kitchen. Generations of barefooted youngsters had run over to the wide, open fireplace, as I did, and flung themselves on one of the broad seats on either side, and stuck out their hardened little toes to the warmth of the turf fire; perhaps they had even stirred up the sods with the long black poker, or blown them to a cheerful flame with the grimy red-leather bellows, as I did: then they must have breathed with satisfaction the tangy odor of peat smoke. They probably stretched their necks, too, to watch the sparks fly up the chimney, and beyond the soot-covered crane and pot-hooks they must have seen smutty hams and flitches of bacon; if they looked well enough, perhaps they saw a tiny patch of blue sky beyond the bend in the chimney.

I wonder whether they too didn't patter across the earth floor to the dresser where the dishes were kept, and where a stone crock of buttermilk always stood beside round yellow-meal cakes. I wonder whether they didn't drag over a heavy chair, too, and stand on the soogan-covered seat to reach for a mug and to dip it into the crock, trying to capture the yellow disks of butter that floated on top. Perhaps, munching the cake, they would timidly put a foot on the ladder that led up to the shadowy loft where the servant boys slept at night, and where all sorts of fairies and pookas were accustomed to gather. Above it they could hardly see the rafters, but from them hung dark bundles which were flitches of pork, even some pigs' heads, and maybe the skin of a mink or a weasel. Some one usually called me just then, and I suppose the other little Carmodys gulped down the last of the cake and swallowed the mugful of milk and bolted out again through the open doorway.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "A County Kerry Kitchen," Marguerite Carmody. Hunter College *Echo*.

## CHAPTER IX

### PUTTING ACTION INTO WORDS

**Words of action.** — We cannot have followed the recent readings from Mr. Walpole and other writers without realizing how much the movement of a passage depends upon its verbs. In sentences where the verbs serve only to hold the nouns and the other words together in grammatical combinations, there can be no sense of life; but where the verbs are chosen, as we have seen them chosen, for their suggestion of action, they supply the sentence with just the quality it needs for an impression of animated movement. Notice Miss Lowell's verbs in "Trades"<sup>1</sup>—her *shaving, pounding, glistening, piling up*; her *screw, shingle, draw, saw*.

I want to be a carpenter,  
To work all day long in clean wood,  
Shaving it into little thin slivers  
Which screw up into curls behind my plane;  
Pounding square, black nails into white boards,  
With the claws of my hammer glistening  
Like the tongue of a snake.  
I want to shingle a house,  
Sitting on the ridge-pole in a bright breeze.  
I want to put the shingles on neatly,  
Taking great care that each is directly between two others.  
I want my hands to have the tang of wood:  
Spruce, Cedar, Cypress.  
I want to draw a line on a board with a flat pencil,  
And then saw along that line,  
With the sweet-smelling sawdust piling up in a yellow heap at my feet.  
That is the life!  
Heigh-ho!  
It is much easier than to write this poem.

<sup>1</sup> *Pictures of the Floating World*, Amy Lowell. Houghton Mifflin.



Harry Kemp, in the following verses,<sup>1</sup> chooses *trod*, *flung*, *swept*, *clove*, *sped*, *heaped*, *backed*, *came rushing out*, *stacked*. There is action, by the way, even in his nouns, — *whirr*, *coil*, *chuff*, *snort*, *streams*.

The green, fresh jackets of eared corn looked cool amid the vibrant  
heat  
As we trod the stacks, and flung, day-long, the yellow bundles of  
corded wheat  
Into the maw of the threshing machine, while the curved knives  
glinted in the sun  
As they swept with a periodic whirr and clove the bundles, one by one.  
The ever-recurring coil of the belt in a black ellipse sped round and  
round,  
And the chuff and snort of the engine's breath the lowing of pastured  
cattle drowned. . . .

Stack after stack our sturdy arms fed into the jaws of the toothed  
machine  
While the blowing-funnel heaped behind the threshed straw separate  
and clean,  
And the farmers backed their wagons up and held brown bags to a  
magic spout  
From which, in intermittent streams, the yellow grain came rushing  
out.  
When amber twilight softly laid its shadows on the rustling corn,  
We stacked our forks, untrussed the belts, and gladly answered the  
supper-horn —  
And, said the foreman, as we sat at board, with hunger whetted keen,  
"Let poets sing of flails and such — But I thank God for the threshing  
machine!"

And Mr. Husband <sup>2</sup> not only uses, where we should expect them, words of vigorous action, *pounded*, *swung*, *lifted*, and *drop*, but he sustains the mood of activity by keeping to words

<sup>1</sup> "The Threshing Machine" in *The Cry of Youth*, Harry Kemp. Mitchell Kennerley.

<sup>2</sup> *America at Work*, Joseph Husband. Houghton Mifflin.

like *slashed*, *reached out*, and *ran*, where a writer less keenly aware of verb values would drop to mere copulatives.

The long concrete slip slashed the beach lines. Beyond its mouth the lake, a brilliant ultramarine, pounded in before the north wind; but inside, the quiet water was tawny with riled sand and the stain of iron. Against the nearest dock an ore steamer rested its long, low body beneath the shadow of a steel trestle that reached out, far above it. With sudden motion a grab-bucket swung down on slender cables from the trestle and disappeared in the waist of the ship. In an instant it lifted on tightened cables, heavy with ore, and swung ashore with grinding vibration of wheels and electric motors, to drop its contents on the ore pile that ran parallel with the dock.

Have the student writers of the following papers made the best of every opportunity for a verb of action?

Before I was fairly inside the kitchen I detected a delicate odor in the air. A basket of wild grapes stood on the table, filling the room with their fragrance. Mother was about to make wild grape jelly, and she soon stirred up a pleasant bustle in the kitchen. First we stripped the grapes from the stems. Mother's fingers moved nimbly. Deftly and swiftly they picked a half dozen grapes to my one. I stopped now and then to lift a cluster to my nostrils and, head tilted back and eyes closed, to inhale the delicious perfume. When the grapes were all off the stems, Mother washed them, while I measured out the sugar, lifting each cup lazily and letting it drift slowly into the pot. Mother interrupted my little snowdrift play by calling me to run and look at the grapes. The washing had removed their frosty bloom and revealed the colors beneath, which seemed to be at once intensified and blended by the water. The grapes were a mass of pink and rich purple and green. I could not admire them long, for Mother put them into a bowl and mashed them vigorously, reducing all that beauty to a pulp, which she set over the fire to cook. Very shortly she strained the grapes and set the juice to cooking again; and while it was bubbling and boiling, she prepared the jelly glasses. Such a washing and rinsing and scalding and polishing with snowy dish-towels as those glasses received! Such a hurrying about for fresh towels and such a beating up of soap-suds as went on! In the midst of this housewifely revel, sizzle, hiss-ss-ss! Mother pounced

upon the cooking jelly, but too late to prevent a whole glassful of the precious stuff from boiling over onto the stove, thereby sending up a grape-perfumed incense to whatever gods preside over the kitchen at canning time.

Now she poured the jelly into bags of fine cheesecloth, from which the juice dripped slowly down into the bowls below in translucent purple drops. One more boiling, assiduous skimming, a critical testing to see whether it would jell, and the jelly was poured into glasses. Mother held one glass up to the light and squinted at it with the eye of a connoisseur. The light came through, clear and purple. She held the glass to her nostrils and sniffed delicately. A reminiscence of country roads and wild things growing, of bright summer days and soft summer winds came to her. With a satisfied smile she set the glass back upon the table. "Forty glasses," she said, "and every one of them a work of art."<sup>1</sup>

Sewing day was one of the delights of Nancy's life. On that day Mrs. Barsky, the seamstress, came early in the morning and stayed until the evening. On that day the most meagre of dinners was prepared, and the beds were made most hastily.

As soon as Nancy came home from school, she ran into the large sunny dining-room, for that was the scene of action. Mrs. Barsky, Mother, and Miriam were all at work. Mrs. Barsky, black-aproned, angular, and efficient, was bending over the sewing-machine in the corner. The treadle creaked rhythmically under her foot; the wheel turned so fast that it made Nancy dizzy to look at it; and Mrs. Barsky's slim, agile fingers skilfully evaded the flying needle. The thread snapped suddenly. Nancy marveled at the way Mrs. Barsky wet the end of the thread, twisted it, and drew it through the needle's eye.

As she sewed, Mrs. Barsky directed her less experienced assistants. "Three lengths of that white material will be plenty, Mrs. Post," she would say or "Don't cut the buttonhole too deep, Miriam." Mother, in a huge white apron, worked at the table in the center of the room. Piled up beside her was a heap of thin white material. She placed the yellow, black-figured tape-measure against the goods and measured off one, two, three yards. With the scissors which hung professionally from a black ribbon around her neck she snipped the goods and tore it straight across. A cloud of whitish dust arose

<sup>1</sup> "Making Jelly," Grace Jackman.



which tickled Nancy's nostrils until she sneezed. At the other side of the table Miriam, her fingers awkward and slow, was sewing buttonholes in Father's shirts. Desperately her thimbled finger pushed the needle through the thick material. Snap! the needle broke. Carefully she placed its parts in the little tray at her side.

Nancy stifled a laugh and filched a piece of bright orange silk from Miriam's basket, for her doll did need a dress.<sup>1</sup>

**Fourth chapter.** — In a novel of Mr. Pryce's,<sup>2</sup> small Christopher wonders:

Didn't grown-up people ever want to see how things were done? Were the sight and sound of the man's soft digging in the sand with a short-handled tool which was half hammer, half pickaxe, nothing to them? Look! He had made the hole now and was lifting the big cube of stone — which in shape and size reminded Christopher of a loaf of English household bread. He was tossing it now to get it into position to fit squarely with its fellows — had thrown it deftly into the place he had prepared for it, and, with the "hammer end" of his implement, was giving it the ringing blows which were somehow as music in Christopher's ears.

Christopher himself is held by all action, — "the men mending the road; the half-naked men taking in logs at the baker's . . . (Come along, Master Christopher!)" And surely "grown-up people" are held by it too. We have all seen them gather on the brink of an excavation to watch the giant hopper fasten its jaws upon a great mouthful of earth and stones, swing it over to a waiting wagon, and drop it thundering upon the boards beneath.

The next chapter of our novel may therefore well be a description of people at work, — women sewing, cooking, or cleaning; men making roads, or building houses, or working in factory or shop or in any place where we can watch them at their work. Before we write we shall see to it that we have caught the mood of the action so that our sentences may swing

<sup>1</sup> "Sewing Day," Edna Bass.

<sup>2</sup> *Christopher*, Richard Pryce. Houghton Mifflin.

along to its rhythm. It is probable that we shall want a shorter sentence span here than we did in our description of a room, a sharper rhythm. Our sentences here may well be simple, short, direct, pounding out the action. And after we have written, we shall look to our verbs to make sure that each of them carries the sense of action; that it is impossible to substitute for any one of them a word which shall more powerfully convey movement and life.

## CHAPTER X

### A FEELING FOR WORD VALUES

**The sound value of words.** — We have seen that the impression which any passage is intended to convey to its readers depends partly on the rhythm of the sentences and partly on the contents of the sentences — that is, on the separate words that compose them. And it is not only the *sense* of the words that contributes to this impression, but also their *sound*. Imitative words, words which attempt an exact equivalent of sound, we have already considered. What is to be observed now is something less obvious. It is not so much to words like *clash* and *clang* in the following passage that we need give our attention, but rather to the harsh combinations of consonants that reënforce the discords of these echo-words without themselves being echo-words, and especially to the still more subtle effect of the quiet music of the last two lines:

Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of arméd heels —  
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Tennyson uses the ugly *s* sounds and the explosive *b*'s and the jerking, laboring syllables that bring their opening and closing consonants sharply together across an inconspicuous vowel — *bare black cliff, juts of slippery crag, sharp-smitten with the dint of arméd heels* — to strengthen the impression of *clashed* and



*clanged*. And then, in contrast with his cliffs and crags, he lets us have the level lake and the moon, a harmony of long vowels — *o*, *a*, *oo* — combined with the liquid grace of the frequent *l*'s and an occasional *m*, *n*, *r*.

That this use of sound values is unconscious, unconsidered, it is impossible for any thoughtful reader to believe. It is surely the result of the most careful, painstaking workmanship. Yet from even our own experience in practicing the craft of writing we must believe also that once a writer becomes critically aware of the sound contents of his phrases, once he begins to be concerned about the tone qualities of his words and to prefer this synonym to that because of its sound, he will soon find that he has an ear for these values and that he has a pen gradually becoming accustomed to this additional carefulness now demanded of it.

**The atmospheric qualities of words.** — The feeling for word values goes still further than this sensitiveness to the actual sounds of vowels and consonants. It goes beyond anything that can be said definitely in words about words. It must almost remain unsaid. When we have tried our best to communicate a sense of it, there is still something over. Words have meaning and words have sound; but, beyond these, words have also a quality, a suggestiveness, that cannot altogether be accounted for by these. Sometimes it may be a matter of derivation: they came to us with the soil from which they have been dugged still clinging to their roots. Sometimes it is a matter of association: they come to us with a light upon them and a music in them caught from the tradition in which they have been used throughout their history. If we want to see what a feeling for these atmospheric qualities of words can do for a writer, we may examine Mr. Masefield's <sup>1</sup> "Cargoes," in which he sets himself three exercises in different keys of words, variations upon the

<sup>1</sup> *Poems*, John Masefield. Macmillan.

same theme — a ship coming into port with its cargo. In each stanza he makes an entirely different kind of music, not through changing rhythms, for the verse pattern remains practically the same, but solely by means of the tone, the color, the atmosphere of the varying words for *ship*, *coming*, and *cargo*:

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,  
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,  
With a cargo of ivory,  
And apes and peacocks,  
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,  
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores,  
With a cargo of diamonds,  
Emeralds, amethysts,  
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke-stack,  
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,  
With a cargo of Tyne coal,  
Road-rails, pig-lead,  
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.

Amy Lowell enjoyed this exquisite playing with words. In one poem <sup>1</sup> she scatters little words upon the paper

Like seeds about to be planted.

She writes:

Bring pencils, fine pointed,  
For our writing must be infinitesimal;  
And bring sheets of paper to spread before us.  
Now draw the plan of our garden beds,  
And outline the borders and the paths  
Correctly.

<sup>1</sup> "Planning the Garden" in *Pictures of the Floating World*, Amy Lowell. Houghton Mifflin.

We will scatter little words  
Upon the paper,  
Like seeds about to be planted;  
We will fill all the whiteness  
With little words,  
So that the brown earth  
Shall never show between our flowers;  
Instead, there will be petals and greenness  
From April till November.

These narrow lines  
Are rose-drifted thrift,  
Edging the paths.  
And here I plant nodding columbines,  
With tree-tall wistarias behind them,  
Each stem umbrella'd in its purple fringe.  
Winged sweet-peas shall flutter next to pansies  
All down the sunny centre.  
Foxglove spears,  
Thrust back against the swaying lilac leaves,  
Will bloom and fade before the China asters  
Smear their crude colours over Autumn hazes.  
These double paths dividing make an angle  
For bushes,  
Bleeding hearts, I think,  
Their flowers jiggling  
Like little ladies,  
Satined, hoop-skirted,  
Ready for a ball.

The round black circles  
Mean striped and flaunting tulips,  
The clustered trumpets of yellow jonquils,  
And the sharp blue of hyacinths and squills.  
These specks like dotted grain  
Are coreopsis, bright as bandanas,  
And ice-blue heliotrope with its sticky leaves,  
And mignonette  
Whose sober-coloured cones of bloom  
Scent quiet mornings.



And poppies! Poppies! Poppies!  
 The hatchings shall all mean a tide of poppies,  
 Crinkled and frail and flowing in the breeze.

. . . . .

There, it is done;  
 Seal up the paper.  
 Let us go to bed and dream of flowers.

**Figurative words.** — In our effort to choose words for their vitality, their sound-value, and their atmospheric quality, we frequently go beyond the boundaries of actual fact. Miss Lowell uses “petals and greenness” rather than *flowers* and *leaves*. She applies “winged,” not to butterflies, which literally have wings, but to sweet peas, which literally have not. Her fox-gloves are spears. Her China asters “smear their crude colours” as though they were painters. Her bleeding hearts jig

Like little ladies,  
 Satined, hoop-skirted,  
 Ready for a ball.

Her hatchings mean a tide, but the waves are waves of poppies.

Our figurative expressions may be as simple as Katherine Mansfield’s figure for Mrs. Stubbs’s shop, which had “two big windows for eyes” and “a broad veranda for a hat,” and whose sign on the roof, “scrawled MRS. STUBBS’S, was like a little card stuck rakishly in the hat crown.” They may, on the other hand, be as sophisticated and as mannered as Mrs. Sedgwick’s figure for the great musician in her novel *Tante*<sup>1</sup>:

Yet the eyes were cold; and touches of wild ancestral suffering, like the sudden clash of spurs in the languors of a Polonaise, marked the wide nostrils and the heavy eyelids and the broad, black crooked eye-brows that seemed to stammer a little in the perfect sentence of her face.

<sup>1</sup> *Tante*, Anne Douglas Sedgwick. Houghton Mifflin.

Most readers, however, probably feel that to compare the face of a beautiful woman to a *sentence* in which the eyebrows *seemed to stammer a little* is so far-fetched as to draw attention away from the face instead of focussing it upon it. This is the danger of searching consciously for a figure: if the search takes the writer far from the subject of his description, it will take the reader far afield too.

Another danger that threatens all use of figurative language is the danger of triteness. If we look back at the trite expressions listed on page 53, we shall find that almost all of them are attempts at figurative expression, stale, blurred figures — the echoes of an echo, the shadows of a shade. Yet perhaps triteness must be guarded against not much more zealously in figurative passages than in pages of the most pedestrian literalness. Certainly any writer who holds timidly aloof from all figures because some may be far-fetched and others may be hackneyed is robbing himself of one of the most natural resources of language.

Indeed the greatest number of figures are those that we use quite unconsciously, without being aware that we have left prosaic literalness behind and that we are using figurative language. Many of these expressions we owe to countless speakers and writers through the ages who have used words so daringly and vividly that we eagerly take up their inventions and repeat them until they become part of the language, and we use them without a thought of their figurative origin. Some one must have been the first to call a uniformed porter at a railroad station a *red cap*; yet we write, "The red cap leaped for her bag" with no sense of quoting a figurative expression from some unknown artist in words. We say, "All New York goes there" without realizing that our unconscious exaggeration for the sake of emphasis is listed in rhetoric textbooks as a figure of speech under a technical name. It is only when we

force ourselves to regard these terms slowly, as we do a moving picture which has been slowed up for our entertainment, that we realize how boldly picturesque they are and how richly our speech and our writing are strewn with them. We show a *cold politeness* or a *hot dislike*. We *freeze into silence* or *flame into ecstasy*. An eye is *sharp*, a glitter *hard*, a smell *clean*. We *hold our tongue*; we never *turn a hair*; we *put our foot in it*. A graceful girl *floats* or *skims* along the road; a gull *wheels* in the sky; a man *worms* his way through a crowd; people come in *streams*. We write "The house *struck* me . . ." without causing any fear for our safety, and we say that we were *thunderstruck* without arousing any apprehension. Not only the garden or the farm may suffer from a *blight*, but our hopes, prospects, or spirits as well. And landlubbers talk glibly of *knowing the ropes*, *getting their bearings*, *cutting adrift*, and *taking another tack*. Thus the common vocabulary is being constantly refreshed and invigorated by figurative usages borrowed from speakers in every calling and every walk of life; and the writer who wishes to avail himself of every resource of the language will draw freely from this copious stream.

Often these figurative expressions retain the *like* or *as* of the expressed comparison. In his recent book on *Words and Idioms*,<sup>1</sup> Logan Pearsall Smith has collected "some of these habitual comparisons which are so numerous in popular speech, and of which a good many are established in the standard language." In his lists are such familiar combinations as *as dull as ditchwater*, *as fit as a fiddle*, *as hard as nails*, *as large as life*, *as old as the hills*, *as right as rain*, *as steady as a rock*, *as stiff as a poker*. *Fit as a fiddle* or *fine as a fiddle* is one of the similes for which Edward Rowland Sill<sup>2</sup> asks our admiration in "The Charms of Similitude."

<sup>1</sup> *Words and Idioms*, Logan Pearsall Smith. Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>2</sup> *The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill*. Houghton Mifflin.



It is surprising [his paper begins] what a pleasure we take in an apt similitude. Not only does it enter largely into our enjoyment of poetry, but it gives zest to all bright colloquial talk. The voluble centre of any group of listeners — on the street or in the drawing-room — is sure to be heard spicing his narration with the “like” and “as” of the frequent simile. If I were a novelist (as I do not at all thank Heaven I am not) I would keep lists of good similitudes; not only those of my own invention, — which I should not expect to be prosperous, — but those picked up by the wayside in actual speech. It is not so much that they adorn the expression of thought as that they illuminate it. . . . It used to be supposed that in poetry, for instance, figures of speech were for mere ornamentation. Now we know that in good poetry they are chiefly used for throwing light. So in colloquial speech: the reason we enjoy them seems to be that they hit out the idea like a flash. There is nothing the mind enjoys, after all, like getting an idea and getting it *quick*. . . .

Now as we are, in a way, and for the present at least, novelists (although, perhaps, we do not at all thank Heaven that we are) we may follow Sill’s suggestion and compile lists of good figures of speech, figures that seem to us as right as rain, as natural, as unforced, as brightening in their effect.

**The fifth chapter.** — For the next chapter of our novel let us take our Celia or Christopher through a park, or over a country road, or along the water front. First, without thinking about the elements of style that we have lately been considering, let us write as rapidly as we can, trying to set the scene down just as it strikes us. Then let us go slowly and carefully over what we have written. Does the sound of the words heighten the effect that we want to convey? It will be well to read the passage aloud so that our ear may help our eye. Is it possible to find words with greater power of suggestion? Let us try first one, then another in this phrase and in that. As we search for the clearest and most effective way of saying what we have in mind, does a figurative expression come to us? Let us write it in. Now that it is on paper, in unflattering black on white, does it seem

natural there? Is it appropriate? Is it fresh? Let us make a clear copy of our chapter as this latest revision leaves it and lay it aside until another time.

When the other time comes, how does the passage sound? Does it, perhaps, seem labored, affected? If it does, we must put it out of sight and write afresh. We must not, however, jump to the conclusion, as writers without very much experience often do, that, just because *we* know how we have slaved over our description, the reader will become unpleasantly aware of the hard work that went into it. We have eliminated and we have amplified; we have tried a half dozen words here only to reject them all; we have dovetailed phrases together there: yet we have not therefore inevitably sacrificed the effect of spontaneity. The freshness and the vitality of our original impression will not be hurt — it should be heightened — by our painstaking workmanship. Only we must be careful to bring to our final revision eyes and ears and a mind that have had a rest from their recent absorption in this task and that can therefore be trusted to judge the result impersonally.

Some writers may want also to put their Christopher or Celia through an imaginative exercise like Amy Lowell's. A chapter of this sort may be added to the novels of those writers who feel that the task is a congenial one. Every one will, of course, write the description of the outdoor scene. This is what Miss Smith does with it in her *Ten Hours*<sup>1</sup>:

Along the top of the road stretched Wykeham Common. As she crossed from the parallel line of the small gray houses and walked through a grove of high leafless elms, only railings separating her from the sodden grasses, the wind rolled strongly across the open space and drowned her in fresh but not cold air. On either side of the narrow asphalt path, the ground was black, and here and there glimmering with rain-pools. Repeated rain had made the bare widths

<sup>1</sup> *Ten Hours*, Constance I. Smith. Harcourt, Brace.

between the grass pulpy; the damp breath of soaked dead leaves and soaked grass and sod came to her nostrils. Twigs and thin branches were scattered beneath the trees, and in the tops of the elms the wind roared; on the pensive skyline the lean bushes of the poplars swung like pendulums. . . .

She passed the pond. The three islands in its center were black and tangled. The water rose in tiny pyramids, some of their slopes wrinkled, while others were smooth like jelly. High against the stone wall, the water rubbed, and its lapping murmur and the sibilant whispering of the island trees and grasses followed her for some way. Once she glanced back, and the pond, brown when she passed it, was now steel colored around its lean tufts of trees. She could see it heaving, but its sound was no longer audible. . . .

The common grew wilder. In low waves of yellow soil spaced with grass and gripped with gorse, it rushed to the railway lines driving through it. Single trees waved above its seats, and files of young saplings stood down its paths; and the keen odors of its pools, and decaying and sprouting allotments, were puffed across its ways, made acrid by the smoke of trains coming and going every minute. . . .

Beyond it was hooped the white bridge with 'buses and cars rattling up and down. On the left of the bridge stretched a row of shops and houses divided by the railway and by side-roads. In one of these roads Celia lived.

She reached the end of the common and crossed the road. The clouds were breaking apart, the common was swept with silver, blue tones stained the gray, and then the sun stood out, barred above and below with cloud, and pale yellow gleams floated over the trees and gilded the houses. Windows flashed red-gold; a pale mist of gold broadened everywhere, and the smokes of the trains hung shining over the spikes of the railings.

Of course it would turn nice just as she was going in! There was not much chance of getting out again to-day!



## CHAPTER XI

### DESCRIBING PEOPLE

All these weeks we have been observing and describing a world of streets and shops and houses; as yet, however, there are in our world no people. We have, it is true, written about people at work, but we were interested in the work as a rhythm of movement — not in the workers as people. Now it is time to make our reader know the people in our world, the people who live in the homes and work in the shops and pass us in the streets. How can we do this? How can we make him see them as we see them and know them? How can we put them into words so that he will get an impression of them as living people?

“I had seen and known men and women,” writes Sherwood Anderson <sup>1</sup> —

I had seen and known men and women, going from their homes to their work, going from their work to their homes, had worked with them in offices and shops. On all sides the untold tales looked out at me like living things.

In Russia England France Germany a writer sat writing. Oh, how well he did his job, and how close I feel to him as I read! What a sharp sense he gives of the life about him! With him one enters into that life. . . . There are sentences written by all writers of note in all countries that have their roots deep down in the life about them. The sentences are like windows looking into houses.

Such a window, it seems to me, is Walter De La Mare's <sup>2</sup> poem, “Old Susan”:

<sup>1</sup> *A Story Teller's Story*, Sherwood Anderson. B. W. Huebsch.

<sup>2</sup> *The Listeners and Other Poems*, Walter De La Mare. Henry Holt.

When Susan's work was done she'd sit,  
With one fat guttering candle lit,  
And window opened wide to win  
The sweet night air to enter in;  
There, with a thumb to keep her place  
She'd read, with stern and wrinkled face,  
Her mild eyes gliding very slow  
Across the letters to and fro,  
While wagged the guttering candle flame  
In the wind that through the window came.  
And sometimes in the silence she  
Would mumble a sentence audibly,  
Or shake her head as if to say,  
'You silly souls, to act this way!'  
And never a sound from night I'd hear,  
Unless some far-off cock crowed clear;  
Or her old shuffling thumb should turn  
Another page; and rapt and stern,  
Through her great glasses bent on me  
She'd glance into reality;  
And shake her round old silvery head,  
With — 'You! — I thought you was in bed!' —  
Only to tilt her book again,  
And rooted in Romance remain.

**Familiarity with subject.** — You will have noticed that Mr. De La Mare has chosen to describe a person whom he has known since he was a child. He has seen and he has remembered all her little ways, and he makes us see them — her habit of keeping her place with her thumb, of mumbling a sentence audibly, of turning the page with her shuffling thumb, of shaking her head over the goings-on of the people in the book as she would over the actions of the little boy himself. Of course, it is nothing new for us to find that an author's best material is on his own street, in his own home; nor is it new for us to find that he can make us enter into the life of his home and the people in it only if he has observed accurately and fully.

**Description through action.** — Notice, too, that it is Susan's actions that set before our eyes Susan's appearance — her stern and wrinkled face, as she reads; her mild eyes, as they glide slowly across the letters; her great glasses, as she bends her glance upon the boy; her round old silvery head, as she shakes it. It seems indirect as a method: in order to get a description of an old woman, we read an account of what she is doing. But her action does carry her directly into our view as no author's catalogue of her face, her eyes, her glasses could ever do. Should we feel that Mr. De La Mare had given us as sharp a sense of Susan's reality if he had written: "Susan's face was stern and wrinkled. Her eyes were mild. Her head was round and silvery"? Again, it is not a new idea for us that, in descriptive writing, action, movement, is life.

As a companion piece to "Old Susan" we may choose "Miss Liza"<sup>1</sup>:

Miss Liza used to sew for us  
 When we were little folk;  
 Her eyes were black like cut-jet beads,  
 Her teeth clicked when she spoke.  
 Across her breast were rows of pins,  
 While dangling from a string  
 Of turkey-red around her waist,  
 Her scissors used to swing.

She made us gay checked gingham frocks  
 With sashes in the back,  
 And when we wriggled, trying on,  
 She'd give our heads a crack  
 With her big thimble made of steel,  
 Or stick us with a pin,  
 And then we'd cry so loud and sharp  
 That Mother would come in  
 To pat the place that hurt, or bring  
 A plate of ginger cakes:

<sup>1</sup> "Miss Liza," Virginia Taylor McCormick. Boston *Transcript*.



Miss Liza'd raise her hands and say:  
"Well this beats all, land's sakes!  
If these ain't just the spoiltest brats!"  
Then Mother'd stay a while  
And give us bits of dotted Swiss  
To make doll-clothes, and smile  
And tell Miss Liza not to mind,  
For children did not know  
How hard it was for grown-up ones  
To make their clothes, and so  
Miss Liza'd sew on petticoats,  
With puffs and tucks in slants,  
And lace-edged ruffled muslin drawers,  
Or little boys' pants.  
Then after supper by the lamp,  
She'd knit and tell us how  
Aunt Annie tried when she was young,  
To milk the spotted cow.  
But best of all the stories was  
The one that Father played  
At scalping Indians and the boys  
Went with him on a raid  
To Farmer Jones's turkey flock,  
Which scattered in affright,  
And over-turned a hive of bees  
That put the boys to flight.

So windy nights when fingers seem  
To tap upon the pane,  
I see Miss Liza knitting socks,  
And hear those tales again.

Here the measure of the verse quickens to keep pace with Miss Liza's briskness. Although the two copulatives — . . . were . . . , . . . *were* . . . — are not so good as Mr. De La Mare's verbs, the description opens well enough with eyes like cut-jet beads, clicking teeth, and rows of pins; and then it gets into its stride with Miss Liza in action, cracking the wriggling

children on the head with her thimble and raising her hands and exclaiming over their shortcomings; and later, in a quieter mood, it settles Miss Liza at the table in the lamp-light, knitting socks and telling stories. These actions are as much a part of any description of Miss Liza as are her snapping eyes and her clicking teeth. We need them not only for their help in imparting to our description the movement of life: we need them for themselves because they are Miss Liza and they are life.

Notice the wealth of illuminating action in the following selection. In it Mr. Pryce<sup>1</sup> is writing not so much to bring Katinka before our eyes as to make her clear to our understanding. He is accordingly writing not description but exposition. Writing that is purely descriptive would get along without his preliminary statement and his running comment. This purely descriptive writing, however, would use Mr. Pryce's material, as we have seen; and it would use it, too, not only to make us *see* Katinka, or Susan, or Miss Liza: it would use it to make us *understand* her as our sight of her actions would make us understand her in life. Mr. Pryce writes of Katinka:

She was, as she had said, good with children. . . . She cast a spell over the most ordinary things so that a walk became as great an adventure as the longest journey David had ever taken; and the trivial round was illumined and glorified. From a walk she would bring back fir cones which she would sew with grass seed, and, lo, presently miniature forests on miniature mountain peaks. She showed the children how to plant mustard and cress upon flannel; and how a beautiful palm-like plant would spring from a mere carrot-top in a saucer of water. Any one could have done this. But the power of enchantment — it took a Katinka for that. The saucer was a lake, the carrot-top an island in the middle of it. Inhabitants were invented to dwell under the shade of its one palm-like tree. Katinka knew the way; had the secret; understood or remembered the child-mind. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *David Penstephen*, Richard Pryce. Houghton Mifflin.

Or she would teach them games. There was Lotto. . . . Or she would dress dolls — not a bit like just dressing dolls (which David affected to despise, but could not help being interested in); or she would fold some paper — newspaper would do — into a long cone-shaped wedge, and giving it cuts on alternate sides with the nursery scissors, would transform it into hanging net-like baskets. . . . She was never at a loss. She could transform a wet day when they couldn't go out into something better than a fine one.

Or Katinka would sing to them, *Ihr Kinderlein Kommet*, and *Ich hat' einen Kamaraden*, *Keinen bessern finds du nicht*, and *Im Rosen Garten*, and *Der Winter ist Kommen*. . . .

**Comment outside the story.** — What we have just said in passing about the difference between the expository and the descriptive method needs to be emphasized. We are preparing ourselves to write descriptions of people, and it is especially in describing people that the young writer falls into the use of labels. Even the writer who would not dream of labelling his street, "Everything added to the dinginess of the street"; or his shop, "Nothing detracted from the neatness of the shop"; or his room, "All in all it was a cozy room"; or his landscape, "It was a beautiful sight"; even this writer, when he describes people, sometimes resorts to the label and writes, "She was a picture of serene old age." Perhaps he is unconsciously obeying the impulse that makes the young — the very young — artist write under the picture he has drawn, "This is you" or "This is a house." But the writer — not so very young — should have the courage of his concrete material. Description should present, as life presents, without labels; it is exposition that neatly sorts and tickets impressions. In description there should be no preliminary explanation, no expository summing up, no analysis of character, no reflections of the author. Let the author keep out; the reader will do his own reflecting. All that he asks of the writer is that he give him the materials on which to reflect.



**Comment within the story.** — If we need note an exception to this general and ruthless rejection of all philosophizing it is this: comment itself may be part of our record — not the author's comment, but the comment of the people in the story. Even in the expository passage which we have been examining, Mr. Pryce begins in the descriptive way — “She was, *as she had said*, good with children” — although he goes on, in the expository way, in his own person. “She was more like a boy than a girl, *every one said*” is, by virtue of those words *every one said*, kept within the story. Indeed, what every one says about the man or woman whom we are describing is often a not unimportant part of the record.

“She was more like a boy than a girl, every one said” opens a short passage which not only illustrates the point that we are now making but also gives the sort of material that we were discussing before our brief digression. It will bring us back to our consideration of the materials of our description. It goes on

She was always carrying hoptoads about in her hat, or tearing her petticoats climbing trees and sliding down the ice house roof. She was sometimes as bold as brass and sometimes one crimson blush of shyness, and she had the strangest ways of showing people that she loved them, — boasting in front of them in a loud gruff voice, making awful faces, twisting one leg around the other, or standing on the sides of her feet.<sup>1</sup>

**Materials of description.** — What a person does is material for description. Material to our purpose, too, is the American seamstress's background of lamplight in the friendly room or the English servant's candlelight and quiet. People do not live suspended in space; they breathe the air of this room or that. Here we see them and here we must describe them if we are to open a window through which the reader may look upon

<sup>1</sup> *The Perennial Bachelor*, Anne Parrish. Harper.

them. In the places where they live and work, people are around them, acting upon them and being acted upon by them; we have the lonely boy, or the restless children eager for a story. People talk, and we observe what they say and the tone in which they say it. They bear about them indications of their occupation — rows of pins across the breast, scissors dangling on a string around the waist. They wear clothes that may be as expressive of what they are or are not as the rooms in which they live. The race from which they spring molds forehead, nose, cheek bone, jaw. Habits of smiling or scowling engrave lines about eyes and mouth. All these are our material.

**The sixth chapter.** — Our sixth chapter will use such material, not enumerating it in a neat bloodless catalogue, not setting it rigidly in a stiff steel engraving of a description, but presenting it as life itself presents it. It must be admitted, of course, that it is not impossible, although it is more difficult, for us to write a readable description of a person and yet use something other than action to keep our writing alive. In the following description, as the boy stands at his dresser shaving, it is not the action that is suggested, but the scrutiny of himself in the mirror. We realize that we are seeing Claude through his own eyes, even before we reach the writer's *he thought*; and it is this interest of the boy in himself that carries the description.

The circus was on Saturday. The next morning Claude was standing at his dresser, shaving. His beard was already strong, a shade darker than his hair and not so red as his skin. His eyebrows and his long lashes were a pale corn-colour — made his blue eyes seem lighter than they were, and, he thought, gave a look of shyness and weakness to the upper part of his face. He was exactly the sort of looking boy he didn't want to be. He especially hated his head, — so big that he had trouble in buying his hats, and uncompromisingly square in shape; a perfect block-head. His name was another source of humiliation. Claude: it was a "chump" name, like Elmer and Roy;

a hayseed name trying to be fine. In country schools there was always a red-headed, warty-handed, runny-nosed little boy who was called Claude. His good physique he took for granted; smooth, muscular arms and legs, and strong shoulders, a farmer boy might be supposed to have. . . .<sup>1</sup>

“**Typical**” people. There is something else about life that the inexperienced writer must remember before he describes men and women: nothing in life is typical. The manicurist is not a typical manicurist, nor the stenographer a typical stenographer. Even the professor is not a typical professor. In life, people are not types; they are individuals. People are *different*. Only the superficial, indifferent observer sees them merged in a uniform pattern.

What do you think of the student theme that follows? Does it show close observation? Does it present its subject in characteristic action? Does it get along without expository comment?<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Benson's green felt bag and woolly gray overcoat were two well-known landmarks of the university. There was a tradition that he had inherited them from his father along with his chair in the English Department. During lectures, this famous coat, topped by a soft gray hat, lay neatly folded on the waste basket. As soon as the bell rang, the doctor always shot out his stiff white cuffs, firmly grasped his gold pencil, looked over his steel-rimmed spectacles, and began to lecture. Settled back in his big swivel chair, he talked rapidly while his long big-jointed fingers played with his pencil. As the lecture proceeded, his small black eyes sparkled; his sallow, deeply lined cheeks grew feverishly red; the nostrils of his large humped nose quivered; and his dry, cracked voice rose higher and higher. If he made a particularly good point, he put his thumbs into the armholes of his vest and teetered back and forth in his chair. His thin blue lips then had a dry ghost of a smile on them, and he managed to lift his chin out of the high stiff collar that usually engulfed it. In moments of excitement he delighted the students by

<sup>1</sup> *One of Ours*, Willa Cather. Knopf.

<sup>2</sup> Marion Woods.



rumpling with his nervous fingers the few white hairs that fringed his shiny head until they stood upright. The doctor always illustrated obscure points by elaborate diagrams on the board. By the end of the hour his neat gray suit was liberally powdered with chalk dust. When the class ended, he laboriously pulled his goloshes over his heavy boots and his thick woolen socks and wrapped himself in his overcoat. Then he clutched his hat, tucked his green felt bag under his arm, and hurried away to his next class.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE NOVEL IN WHICH NOTHING HAPPENS: NARRATION WITHOUT PLOT

The step from description to narration. — From presenting people in action in description, it is not a long step to presenting them in action in narration. It needs only a shift of interest from what they look like as they act, to what they are doing as they look like that. This sort of narration, it is evident, will not have what is called *story* or *plot*; but to compensate for the lack of this kind of interest it will have another: the interest in the spectacle of life even in its most everyday, bread-and-butter aspects. Maurice Hewlett wrote novels about maidens who cut off their long locks, and, disguised as boys, followed the knight of their choice into the forest; but the novel he wanted to write was the kind that we are attempting. He confessed:

I have often wished that I could write a novel in which, as mostly in life, thank goodness, nothing happens. Jane Austen, it has been objected, forestalled me there, and it is quite true that she very nearly did — but not quite. It was a point for her art to make that the novel should have form. Form involved plot, plot a logic of events; events — well, that means that there were collisions. They may have been mild shocks, but persons did knock their heads together, and there were stars to be seen by somebody. In life, in a majority of cases, there are no stars, yet life does not on that account cease to be interesting. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Hewlett found the “real charm” of a book (*The Early Diary of Frances Burney*) in “the series of faithful pictures it contains of the everyday round of an everyday family. Dutch pic-

<sup>1</sup> “The Crystal Vase” in *In a Green Shade*, Maurice Henry Hewlett. G. Bell.

tures all — passers-by, a knock at the front door, callers . . . ; a jaunt to Greenwich, a concert at home. . . .”

**The everyday round.** — The materials of the story-writer are no other, then, than the materials that we have been using since we began writing together. The difference, as has just been said, is in the emphasis. Now it is not so much what the people look like as they go on a jaunt to Greenwich — or to Coney Island — or to the country fair; it is the jaunt itself. It is hunting, fishing, swimming, skiing. It is getting up in the morning and going to bed at night; eating a meal — perhaps buying it or cooking it; getting the children ready for school; going to work; conducting a club meeting; following the routine of a college day; being graduated; looking for a job; going to work; coming home from work. It may be the story of a tired woman going through the closing tasks of a long day.

Mrs. Mueller dropped the milking stool beside the last cow and sat down heavily. Behind the pointed tops of the evergreen windbreak the sunset smouldered dull yellow; near the pasture gate the other cows moved restlessly, lumbering shadows in the September twilight. The barnyard was full of subdued sound — the crunching of the horses in the barn, the slow breathing of the cows, the swish of milk against the side of the pail. The woman worked steadily, head bent, big arms moving in even rhythm, while the glow faded and dusk settled over the fields, blurring the hills into drifts of shadow. When the last sprays of milk had cut lightly through the foam, she picked up the pail, threw the stool into the corner of the yard, and with a slap and a shove started the cow towards the pasture. “Hi, there, get out of here,” she shouted hoarsely as she flung open the gate, and to the big collie, “Take ’em to the pasture, Pete.” The cows shambled down the lane, unhurried by the dog yelping at their heels; Mrs. Mueller leaned against the gate, a gray, clumsy figure in the deepening darkness. The sunset had burned down to a streak of silver on the horizon, and the evergreens stood black against the fading light. . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Where’s Minnie,” Alma Burnham Hovey. *The Midland*, January, 1923.



It may be the story of a husky competing in a skiing tournament:

Swan Swanson drew the first place. There were thirty-three of them, stamping and laughing, and joking. He fastened his number to the chest of his red sweater, and threw down his mackinaw coat and his double yarn mittens. He flapped his arms and stamped his feet and climbed the ladder which rose from the hilltop to the peak of the slide. The country below him was as white and as smooth as a frosted cake, and the evergreens were like candles, ready for the match.

Swan Swanson stood on the platform at the top, and shoved his toes into the straps of his skis and slipped the thong well over his heel. The wooden slide, padded with evergreen boughs and covered with a layer of snow, packed and firm, was a precipice at his feet. In a minute, now, Swan Swanson would slide down that sheer descent to the take-off half way down the hill, and he would shoot out into space from that take-off like a ball from a cannon, and if he were lucky, he would land on his feet somewhere near the blue spruce which was planted like a warning in the snow. Swan Swanson felt the muscles ripple in his legs and arms and torso. He laughed.

There he stood at the top with his great arms folded on his chest. There was a bugle call. He heard its echoes in the valley. Then he crouched and glided forward and plunged down the steep and slippery slide. The air was a whistle in his ears. The trees were a streak before his eyes.

He straightened when he reached the take-off. He flung out his arms like wings, and like wings they bore him through the air. He seemed to be soaring over the tops of the little firs. The wind was a hurricane on his face and chest. He looked for the little blue spruce, and he saw it, at last, far ahead, on his left. If he had been a hawk, he could have reached it with two flaps of his wings. If the slide had been steeper . . . if his start had been faster. . . . But the ground was eager for his feet; it drew him down like a magnet. The little blue spruce was still three yards ahead of him when he landed with a tremendous whack in the snow. His knees bent, and straightened again. Yelping, he coasted triumphantly to the bottom of the hill, and waved his arms, and laughed at the crowd.

Swan Swanson did not immediately climb back to the hilltop.

Instead he stood, as near as he dared, to the little blue spruce. He stripped a handful of its juicy needles and chewed them as he waited. His eyes narrowed to a little slit when he saw an orange sweater and an orange cap at the top of the slide. Lars Olson, who had been first last year, was now twenty-first. He was a Baltimore oriole with long, yellow toes. Yet he crouched like a cat, and like a cat he jumped, claws spread, and like a cat he landed on his feet not two yards behind the blue spruce. He grinned at Swan Swanson as he passed.

Swan Swanson snapped a bough from the tree. He struck a piece of it through the stitches of his sweater. He glared and frowned and spat in the snow and mumbled in Swedish as he climbed with his long skis over his shoulder past the crowd to the top of the hill.

The bugle notes, this second time, were clear and true and very cold. Swan Swanson crouched even lower than Lars Olson; he leaped even higher; he landed within four feet of the blue spruce. His laugh echoed in the valley as he veered to the left at the bottom of the hill.

A second time Swan Swanson waited by the blue spruce until he saw the orange streak of Lars Olson's body on the sky. He saw the grooves in the under side of Lars Olson's skis. Lars Olson seemed to keep himself aloft with the flapping of his long orange arms. He seemed to draw his knees up, so that his skis cleared the snow. While he floated and soared, Swan Swanson chewed the ends of his yellow moustache.

The skis whacked on the snow. If Lars Olson had been ten feet to the left, he would have landed on the blue spruce. As it was, his second jump exceeded Swan Swanson's by more than a yard . . . provided, of course, he could keep his balance. Otherwise, Swan Swanson knew, as he bent to watch, that Olson might as well not have jumped at all.

Lars Olson struggled to right himself. He twisted and wriggled and pawed the air. He snorted and sputtered. He swore. He lurched, and caught himself; lurched again, and caught himself . . . and he toppled, at last, still struggling, into a drift. He rolled over down the bank. His skis spun like pinwheels on the Fourth of July.

Swan Swanson laughed until he doubled up. He thumped his knees and his broad red chest. He danced in the snow. He shook the snow from the boughs of the little blue spruce. Like a giant, now, he strode

up the snow banks. His hearty laugh bounded down the hillside. His long skiis were like feathers on his wide shoulder.

He could now hardly wait for the bugle call. He looked, as he hurtled down, for the green-blue cone of the spruce. He flapped his great red arms and drew up his long yellow feet. And he saw, as he soared, the tip of the blue spruce under his hand.

He was jolted by the shock of his landing. The red tips of his skiis tried to meet and cross and throw him to the ground. He struggled to hold them straight. He doubled up and twisted half way around and pawed the air. He grunted and moaned and swore. He lurched, and caught himself; and lurched again, and caught himself again. He had no idea where he was, or how much farther he had to go when he heard the cheers of the crowd. They were shouting: "Swan! Swan! Hi Swan!" Still gesticulating like a clown, Swan Swanson swerved into a snow bank at the foot of the hill, and stood upright, with his arms outspread. He laughed, because around the corner of the log house, he saw Lars Olson hitching his team to his sleigh.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Parrish<sup>2</sup> suggests what can be done with some such subject as making Christmas decorations:

They all went up to the Sunday school room in the evening, to make the Christmas decorations for the church by the light of the dim oil lamps in their brackets. Lily and Victor made little bunches of cedar and laurel — two sprays of laurel and one of cedar, and then two sprays of cedar and one of laurel — and handed them up to the others, who bound them with string on long ropes. Lily had tried to make the ropes, but her sprays always came tumbling out, just as poor Aunt Priscilla's did. How fragrant the evergreens were, and how black they made everyone's hands! . . .

When the decorations were finished, the ropes and the wreaths, and the big star of box and holly to hang over the chancel, and when Mr. Almond's knife was found, the scraps of pine and cedar were burnt in the stove, roaring up sudden and white, and then popping like little pistol shots. How fragrant! They all gathered around the stove to warm themselves before going out into the winter night, while Uncle Willie stood on a chair and blew out the lamps.

<sup>1</sup> "The Blue Spruce," Winifred Sanford. *American Mercury*, May, 1926.

<sup>2</sup> *The Perennial Bachelor*, Anne Parrish. Harper.



**The seventh chapter.** — We may write a narrative of some routine activity and use it as the next chapter of our novel. Beginning the day seems to work into the novel more readily than other subjects, for I always find among my themes scores of papers that carry their characters through the early hours. In the two that follow may be noted at least those virtues that must now have a familiar sound even to the most indifferent ear. What are they?

The alarm clock was set for seven, and yet at six-thirty Mrs. Maizer shot out her thin hand from under the warm covers and pushed the alarm trigger from "On" to "Off." She was getting old and she didn't need so much sleep. Besides too much sleep made you fat, like that Mrs. Cohen who lived on the top floor and kept a maid.

She looked around the room and sighed faintly. She wished that Lillie would put her clothes away when she went to bed. But wishing never did any good! With one hand she groped about on the floor for her felt bedroom slippers while with the other hand she balanced herself in the bed. As soon as she had her feet in the slippers, she threw off the blankets and scurried into her warm brown kimono. Quickly she gathered up and hung away the flimsy pink chiffon dress that Lillie had worn the night before. Lillie had left it crumpled up over her shoes on a chair. Mrs. Maizer put shoe trees into Lillie's silver kid pumps and dropped into a basin of water the pair of sheer stockings that had been rolled into balls and shoved into the toes of the slippers. A nudge on Lillie's shoulder brought a long dreary nasal hum, followed by "Awright, Ma."

Ma tiptoed into the kitchen and washed up the telltale remnants of a gathering of some of Jack's friends the night before. There were two stacks of plates rimmed with sticky pink and chocolate, with the spoons dangling dangerously from them, and a few ash trays overflowing with ashes and cigarette stubs. In a few minutes Ma was ready to fill the coffee percolator and to set the small kitchen table for breakfast.

The muffled scream of an alarm clock followed by the opening of a door told Ma that Jack was up.

"Say, Ma," Lillie called, "did you see that pair of stockings I washed out yesterday?"

"No."

"Oh, Ma, I put them on your dresser."

"Well, I'm sorry. I didn't see them."

Now Jack called. "Ma, did my brown suit come back from the cleaner's?"

"Yes, it's in your closet."

At eight o'clock she called them into the kitchen. It was warm and bright and it smelled of fresh coffee. It was easy to serve Jack; he gulped down whatever was given him. But Lillie was a problem.

"I'm not hungry, Ma. I don't want any breakfast."

"Don't be foolish, Lillie. You can't leave the house on an empty stomach."

"Ma, she's trying to keep the slim and girlish," came from Jack.

"Aw, shut up."

Breakfast had begun. . . . Ma rushed back and forth from stove to table in order to have the cereal just thick enough, the eggs just brown enough, the coffee just hot enough. . . . Breakfast was over.

"By, Ma."

A peck from Lillie, an affectionate hug from Jack, a slam of the door, and Ma was alone.<sup>1</sup>

Maria shivered and opened her eyes slowly. She saw the thin fingers of grey light coming through the closed shutters and sighed. She was sinking back into a mist of sleep when a rooster shattered the silence and woke her once more. Gingerly she slipped one foot from under the quilt. Brr — it was cold. She could see her breath coming in little puffs. Well, she might as well get it over. She slid out onto the floor and groped for her slippers with one foot while she hastily thrust her arms into her grey wrapper. Her exploring foot found the slippers where she had dropped them the night before and she slipped into them, one big toe sticking out of a hole.

Bundling her wrapper around her, she shuffled over to the little mirror and knotted her straggly wisps of yellow-white hair in a hard knob on the top of her head, viciously jabbing in a solitary hairpin. She stopped a moment before the glass. In the feeble light her face was a sickly white with a network of wrinkles. Her blue eyes seemed to be getting paler; her colorless mouth drooped wearily. There were bags under her tired eyes, and a frown drew the whitish eye-

<sup>1</sup> Frances Stavisky.

brows together. And, she told herself, she was not an old woman! She turned with a sigh and stumbled listlessly down the dark narrow stairs. She pushed open the door at the foot of the stairs, shoving up the latch with a clatter. Giving barely a glance to the room with its big oilcloth-covered table, piled high with clean dishes — Maria didn't have a china-closet like the Pullens — she moved to the great black stove. My, it was getting light quick! She'd have to get a move on to get the men's breakfast before six.

Snatching a newspaper from the wood-box she crumpled it and stuffed it into the stove, lifting the lid noisily. She quickly shoved in a few sticks of pitch-pine — they got all their firewood from the ties the railroad men gave them — and struck a match with an explosive little crack. She slammed the lid back and got out the big frying pan from its place in the oven. She shuffled into the dark cold pantry and returned with a bowl of sliced cold potatoes, a bowl filled to the top with fragrant yellow butter — yesterday was churning day — and a basketful of brown eggs, to some of which little grey feathers still clung. The potatoes she dumped into the smoking frying pan, and the eggs she cracked into another pan. With a knife from the crowded table she chopped and stirred the browning potatoes. Quickly she pushed forward a large blue-enameled coffee pot to the center of the stove, and soon the smell of strong coffee mingled with the brown smell of the frying potatoes.

Above the sizzling she heard a door slam upstairs. They must be getting up. She dumped the potatoes into a big cracked bowl and with a broad knife deftly lifted the eggs from the pan to the platter. She set these with the coffee on the blue calico hot-plate holders on the table. Was everything ready? She could hear their heavy boots clumping down the stairs. No, she had forgotten the bread and the pot-cheese. She scurried into the pantry, returning with a huge brown loaf under one arm and a bowl of creamy white pot-cheese under the other. She slammed them on the table and, giving the room one quick glance, she stumbled up the stairs to dress.<sup>1</sup>

**Points of structure and style.** — For this plotless narrative that we are writing, the only questions of structure are the order in which we shall arrange the details and the importance which we shall ascribe to each of them. And, indeed, the order

<sup>1</sup> Alice Raff.



of the details is dictated by their actual sequence in time. As for style, the manner of our narrative writing is still the manner of our descriptive writing, with particular care to choose verbs that are really words of action and to construct sentences that preserve the rhythm, slow or fast, of the action.

Notice, in the following story, the relish with which the writer sets down every detail and the short blunt sentence structure with which he gives the quick, expert movements of the fisherman:

Rapidly he mixed some buckwheat flour with water and stirred it smooth, one cup of flour, one cup of water. He put a handful of coffee in the pot and dipped a lump of grease out of a can and slid it sputtering across the hot skillet. On the smoking skillet he poured smoothly the buckwheat batter. It spread like lava, the grease spitting sharply. Around the edges the buckwheat cake began to firm, then brown, then crisp. The surface was bubbling slowly to porousness. Nick pushed under the browned under-surface with a fresh pine chip. He shook the skillet sideways and the cake was loose on the surface. I won't try and flop it, he thought. He slid the chip of clean wood all the way under the cake, and flopped it over onto its face. It sputtered in the pan.

When it was cooked Nick regreased the skillet. He used all the batter. It made another big flapjack and one smaller one.

Nick ate a big flapjack and a smaller one, covered with apple butter. He put apple butter on the third cake, folded it over twice, wrapped it in oiled paper and put it in his shirt pocket. He put the apple butter jar back in the pack and cut bread for two sandwiches.

In the pack he found a big onion. He sliced it in two and peeled the silky outer skin. Then he cut one half into slices and made onion sandwiches. He wrapped them in oiled paper and buttoned them in the other pocket of his khaki shirt. He turned the skillet upside down on the grill, drank the coffee, sweetened and yellow brown with the condensed milk in it, and tidied up the camp. It was a nice little camp.

Nick took his fly rod out of the leather rod-case, jointed it, and shoved the rod-case back into the tent. He put on the reel and threaded the line through the guides. He had to hold it from hand to

hand, as he threaded it, or it would slip back through its own weight. It was a heavy, double tapered fly line. Nick had paid eight dollars for it a long time ago. It was heavy to lift back in the air and come forward flat and heavy and straight to make it possible to cast a fly which has no weight. Nick opened the aluminum leader box. The leaders were coiled between the damp flannel pads. Nick had wet the pads at the water cooler on the train up to St. Ignace. In the damp pads the gut leaders had softened and Nick unrolled one and tied it by a loop at the end to the heavy fly line. He fastened a hook on the end of the leader. It was a small hook; very thin and springy.

Nick took it from his hook book, sitting with the rod across his lap. He tested the knot and the spring of the rod by pulling the line taut. It was a good feeling. He was careful not to let the hook bite into his finger.

He started down to the stream, holding his rod, the bottle of grasshoppers hung from his neck by a thong tied in half hitches around the neck of the bottle. His landing net hung by a hook from his belt. Over his shoulder was a long flour sack tied at each corner into an ear. The cord went over his shoulder. The sack flapped against his legs.

Nick felt awkward and professionally happy with all his equipment hanging from him. The grasshopper bottle swung against his chest. In his shirt the breast pockets bulged against him with the lunch and his fly book.

He stepped into the stream. It was a shock. His trousers clung tight to his legs. His shoes felt the gravel. The water was a rising cold shock.

Rushing, the current sucked against his legs. Where he stepped in, the water was over his knees. He waded with the current. The gravel slid under his shoes. He looked down at the swirl of water below each leg and tipped up the bottle to get a grasshopper.

The first grasshopper gave a jump in the neck of the bottle and went out into the water. He was sucked under in the whirl by Nick's right leg and came to the surface a little way down stream. He floated rapidly, kicking. In a quick circle, breaking the smooth surface of the water, he disappeared. A trout had taken him.

Another hopper poked his head out of the bottle. His antennæ wavered. He was getting his front legs out of the bottle to jump. Nick took him by the head and held him while he threaded the slim hook under his chin, down through his thorax and into the last seg-

ments of his abdomen. The grasshopper took hold of the hook with his front feet, spitting tobacco juice on it. Nick dropped him into the water.

Holding the rod in his right hand he let out line against the pull of the grasshopper in the current. He stripped off line from the reel with his left hand and let it run free. He could see the hopper in the little waves of the current. It went out of sight.

There was a tug on the line. Nick pulled against the taut line. It was his first strike. Holding the now living rod against the current, he brought in the line with his left hand. The rod bent in jerks, the trout pumping against the current. Nick knew it was a small one. He lifted the rod straight up in the air. It bowed with the pull.

He saw the trout in the water jerking with his head and body against the shifting tangent of the line in the stream.

Nick took the line in his left hand and pulled the trout, thumping tiredly against the current, to the surface. His back was mottled the clear, water-over-gravel color, his side flashing in the sun. The rod under his right arm, Nick stooped, dipping his right hand into the current. He held the trout, never still, with his moist right hand, while he unhooked the barb from his mouth, then dropped him back into the stream.

He hung unsteadily in the current, then settled to the bottom beside a stone. Nick reached down his hand to touch him, his arm to the elbow under water. The trout was steady in the moving stream, resting on the gravel, beside a stone. As Nick's fingers touched him, touched his smooth, cool, underwater feeling he was gone, gone in a shadow across the bottom of the stream.

He is all right, Nick thought. He was only tired. . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *In Our Time*, Ernest Hemingway. Boni and Liveright.



## CHAPTER XIII

### COLLISIONS: NARRATION WITH PLOT

The source of plot. — “A novel, in which,” wrote Maurice Hewlett, “as *mostly* in life, . . . nothing happens.” Mrs. Maizer and Maria get up in the morning, and prepare meals, and wash dishes, and go to bed at night. They do this day in and day out. In their life, *mostly*, nothing happens. But a morning comes when Lillie has been a little more heedless than usual or when Maria’s distaste at what she sees in the mirror is a little less to be borne. Perhaps Maria’s sister Lizzie, younger by only a few years, comes on a visit from California, where she moved after her marriage; and Maria sees her still young and fresh, while Maria is old and worn-out. Lizzie insists that there is still a chance for Maria — if Maria will take it. She need not be a drudge forever. She need only leave her father and go with her sister. Here are collisions. They make us question the reason Hewlett assigns for Jane Austen’s plots. Have her novels plots solely because of her exacting sense of form? Or have they plots because life, *mostly* without happenings, sometimes does bring heads together in collisions? Even in Jane Austen’s quiet backwater, single gentlemen of large fortune moved into the neighborhood and mammas of marriageable daughters began to scheme and contrive. Here are mild shocks, collisions. And Jane Austen, in recording the events that sprang from the collisions, was committed to novels with plots.

Hewlett’s word *collisions* is as good a word as any for what happens in life that gives plot to literature. For forty years

Mother has wanted a new house, and for forty years Father has been building, not the new house, but new barns. Mother might go on without the new house for another forty years, were it not that Nanny, her daughter, who is about to be married, is frail, and that Mother wants her to live on at home where Mother can keep the burden of work from the girl's shoulders. Now the old house is wretchedly inadequate; a new house must be obtained. And so after all these years of meek submission, Mother's will clashes with Father's; and "The Revolt of Mother"<sup>1</sup> has plot.

**Struggle between one person and another.** — Plot often comes through this collision between people — husband and wife, parents and children, neighbors, classmates. An old man who knows that he will be unbearably bored by inaction may be pressed by his children to retire from business and "enjoy" life. A mother who has always managed her home may feel herself supplanted by the daughter-in-law who is trying to spare the older woman the care of the house. Children may think that they are entitled to more freedom than their parents are willing to allow them. Parents may think themselves neglected by children whose interests draw them away from the home. A man may succeed in business and now be ambitious to live in a circle and on a scale which his wife finds formidable, terrifying. A woman may be envious of neighbors who spend more than she does and may attempt to drive her cautious husband into expenditures that he cannot afford. Husband and wife may differ about the education of their children, about their religious training. A woman may want to adopt a child; her husband, her mother, may oppose her wish.

The collision may be over less important matters. A daughter may tease her parents to refurnish the home in the current

<sup>1</sup> *A New England Nun and Other Stories*, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. Harper.

fashion, or to move into a more pretentious neighborhood. A wife may have upon her hands the training of a husband who is affronted when she insists upon a definite and regular allowance, a budget for the home; or a husband who thinks it beneath his dignity to assist in any way in the work of the home. A husband or a small boy may want to own a dog; a wife, a mother, an aunt, or a grandmother may most decidedly not want a dog about the house.

**Struggle between a person and impersonal forces.** — But the collision is not always between people. A man may knock his head against the universe and see stars. It may be that it is not the will of another human being that thwarts him, but an environment from which he tries to escape, circumstances that hedge him in. He may pit his strength against public opinion, a political machine, the prevailing attitude toward religion. Here, too, the conflict may be over important or unimportant matters: it may involve the fate of a community or the happiness of a small boy for a day. It may be caused by a man's defiance of the social system or a boy's desire to stand well with his fellows.

**Struggle within a person.** — Or the struggle may be waged between the warring impulses and standards of conduct within a man's own mind. A man can write what he considers good poetry, or paint good pictures, or compose good music. This the public will have none of, but it shows itself eager for the sort of thing that he considers insincere, inartistic, vulgar. Perhaps he has a family to support. A chemist has the choice of going into the employ of a commercial house at a princely salary or going on with his work in the research laboratory of his college at a starvation wage. A college athlete on whom hangs the fate of his college in a coming contest can remain on the team only if he passes his history test, and can pass his history test only if he cheats. A girl must decide between accept-



ing a traveling fellowship for which she has been working during her entire college course and staying at home to keep within her influence a brother who is being antagonized by a well-meaning but inept father. A woman may realize her cherished dream of going to the city and preparing herself to be a nurse, only if she permits her young sister to forego the love that has just come to her; for one of the two must stay with their invalid mother. A boy wavers between his longing to escape the ordeal of reciting before the assembled school and his horror of being a quitter. A girl is torn between her desire to show her affection for people and her ingrained reserve that will not let her speak out.

Out of these collisions grow stories with plot. And these collisions are occurring around us all the time. Can any one have read the possibilities of conflict that we have just enumerated without recalling many similar instances from his own experience or from his knowledge of the life of his family and his circle of friends? These are the material of our next adventure in writing.

And here it will be necessary to relinquish — reluctantly, I hope — the novel that we have been working with for the past few months. For if we were to attempt to write out a struggle on the scale of a novel, it would take a much longer time than the weeks that remain of our course together. Students, it is true, do occasionally complete novels that they began in college courses, and occasionally these novels reach a much larger public than the college theme reader and the students' classmates. These, however, usually ripen during the long leisure of summer vacations. Certainly they cannot be prescribed generally for any group of student writers during the crowded months of the college term. Accordingly we turn now from the large spaces of the novel to the abbreviated confines of the short story.

**The choice of short story material.** — The first step for us to take is to decide upon the material that we shall use. From our own experience or from the life that goes on about us we choose a conflict that has in some way won our interest and that now stands out in our mind. It may come from recollections of a fairly remote childhood in school or at home; from memories of more recent days in high school; from impressions of our college life. The struggle may be between one person and another, or between a person and impersonal forces, or between divergent tendencies within the person himself. The people involved in the struggle must be, as we are now all surely aware, people of the sort with whom we have grown up, whom we meet day after day, whom we know almost as well as we know ourselves. Their social environment must be one with which we are thoroughly familiar. The town, the city, or the countryside in which they live must be one that belongs to us by reason of our close acquaintance with it. The incidents that happen in the course of the story must not outrage our sense of what might be expected to happen to such people in such an environment.

**The limitation in time.** — In addition to these limitations — limitations within which we have been writing all along — there is an additional limitation imposed upon us by the brevity of the short story. If we have in mind a course of events that stretches out over a long period of years, it probably will not serve us as material for a short story. Certainly we cannot tell it in its entirety, beginning at the beginning, unfolding it gradually, producing convincingly an impression of the lapse of time, continuing to the end. This is the province of the novel: it does not belong within the narrow boundaries of the short story. For the short story we may single out from this long series one brief section that will serve as an illuminating condensation of the whole. We may throw the light of our nar-

ration on just that fragment of life that encloses the culmination of a conflict of long duration. We may even limit our selection to one day only, if we wish. What we may not do is to let it spread over a long interval.

**Preliminary statement of struggle.** — This material that we have decided upon we had better put into the form of a written statement and bring to class for general discussion. Often even a tenuous idea for a story gains definiteness and solidity through question and comment. Since we are committed to struggle as plot, let us word our plot in terms of struggle. Baldly, this would resolve itself into the formula: The struggle in my story is between A and B. In the end B triumphs.

Our statement, however, should be much more than a bald formula. A and B should carry, from the very beginning, names such as they bear in life. The actual names of the actual people we may not use. We may, however, choose names that suggest the real ones. In our set, it may be, a certain sort of name is usually not given. Perhaps Rosabelle, Arlene, Ethelbert, and Percival are names that are unthinkable in our circle. These are not, then, the names that we should choose for our acquaintances in the story that we write about them. Particularly is this true of surnames that reflect race. A story about a conflict between parents who had selected a prospective husband for their daughter and the daughter who rebelled against their dictation, although it had the support of the social sanction of the circle in which they moved, seemed incredible when the characters bore such names as Leigh and Overton but won belief as soon as the student writer admitted that in life the family names indicated a Middle-European origin. Another student, with a story about a struggle in the mind of a son between his desire to go to see his old mother before she died and his fear lest he be seized for military service, convinced her class audience only when she consented to change the English-



sounding names of her choice to the Italian names that gave the story the foundation it needed.

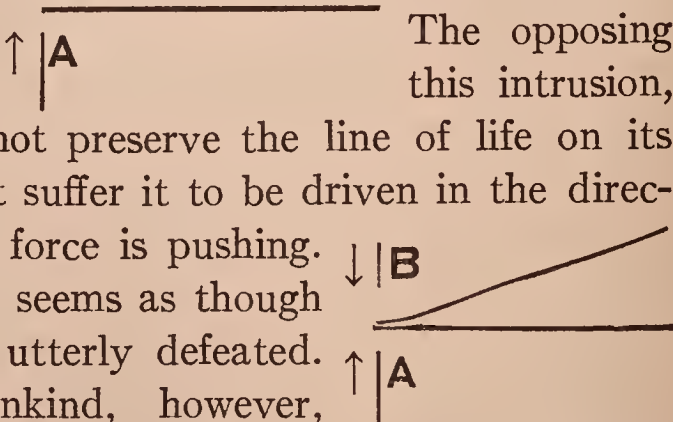
Our statement, definite now in the names of its characters, must be equally explicit in setting down the conflict. The bare statement, "The struggle is between Abigail Bennet and her husband Jonathan," tells nothing. Our critics need fully as much information as is given in "The struggle is between Jonathan Bennet's habit of meddling in the affairs of his wife and daughter, innocent enough in its motive but sometimes disastrous in its consequences, and the suddenly awakened determination of his wife Abigail that for one day he shall not interfere, especially as his meddling may come between their daughter Clary and Ballard, the young man to whom she is engaged." Nor is it sufficient to conclude: "Abigail succeeds." If comment on the story is to be helpful, the statement must be at least as detailed as "Abigail, although habitually a woman of unswerving truthfulness, lies desperately, repeatedly, and convincingly in answer to her husband's questions and suggestions and thus saves the day for Clary, and herself derives a half-defiant satisfaction from her 'day off.' " <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "A Day Off," in *A County Road*, Alice Brown.

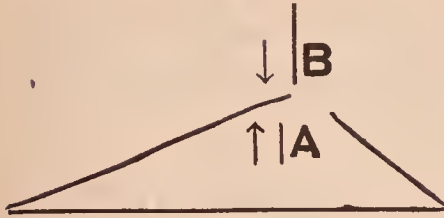
## CHAPTER XIV

### PATTERN: THE DRAMATIC TYPE OF PLOT

Thus far we have clung pretty closely to life, and even what we are now about to attempt does not depart very far from it. Any art develops certain patterns, more or less set. Music has its patterns for sonata and symphony. Architecture builds from patterns capable of infinite variation but reducible to well-defined styles. Poetry has a rigid pattern for a sonnet and a flexible pattern for an ode. Drama has a pattern, and it is this pattern that the short story based on conflict has taken for its own.

**The triangle of dramatic structure.** — You will probably remember from your high school studies in the plays of Shakespeare that the pattern of the drama has been traced as a triangle. To the level line of life malice or ambition or envy or hatred applies a force.  The opposing force, although resisting this intrusion, is less powerful and cannot preserve the line of life on its accustomed level but must suffer it to be driven in the direction in which the hostile force is pushing. A moment comes when it seems as though A were invincible and B utterly defeated. The experience of mankind, however, crystallized in proverb, reminds us that it is always darkest before dawn; that when the tale of bricks is heaviest, then comes Moses. In accordance with the wisdom of our common experience, then, B is vouchsafed strength; A weakens.

The line of life is forced toward the goal of B's desire.



The strife and the story end with B's triumph. That all human experience follows this norm, no one, of course, can maintain; but it is sufficiently the

common lot to make it not too artificial a pattern even for those who believe that all patterns in art should grow from within and not be imposed arbitrarily from without upon it.

Let us take a story in which the pattern is clearly defined. Let us name accurately the two forces that are struggling together. Let us look to the end to see which force triumphs ultimately. Let us trace the story backwards until we find the moment in the latter part of it when this force began to show that it was not completely beaten. Let us do the same for the force that seemed triumphant during the first part of the story: let us find the moment of its greatest apparent triumph and also the moment when the action began in the first evidence of conflict between the two forces.

**Structural points of the short story.** — It is inconvenient, when we are discussing these moments in the structure of the story, to use long explanatory phrases to designate them. A terminology has, accordingly, developed. The nomenclature which I consider simplest and most logical uses the term *initial incident* for the first moment when the reader is conscious of a struggle. This point comes, of course, at the beginning or very near the beginning of so short a narrative as the short story. From this moment the action rises, in a series of events to which is given the self-explanatory name *rising action*, to the point where the force that has been stronger throughout this rising action seems invincible. This moment is called the *climax*. Notice that, although this term is frequently used in other connections, we are employing it as a technical term and are giving it a meaning that arises solely from the *structure* of the story as



the product of the conflict of two forces. It is possible that this structural climax of the story may be the emotional climax as well, the highest point of interest and emotional stress in the story; but this is not inevitable.

After the climax there is a moment of hesitation during which the crest of the wave of action seems to hang suspended, wavering. But although it looks as though it might sweep forward resistlessly and bear with it the force now uppermost, we experienced readers are not entirely deceived. There have been indications — and we have recognized them — that the force apparently defeated will come into its own. Immediately upon the climax, then, follows the moment when we are certain of this, the moment that is called the *turning-point*. This turns the story securely downward through the *falling action* to its goal, the victory of the force that has been gaining during this latter part of the action. This moment is known technically as the *catastrophe* — even if it gives the story a happy ending. I mention this because of an experience I once had with a group of students. I was overwhelmed by the prevailingly tragic tone of the stories as, one after the other, they were brought before the class for comment. I protested that life was really not invariably gloomy, only to be told, in an indignant chorus, that the class was of this opinion, too, but that since I had asked for catastrophes — !

These terms we shall use in our analysis of “Ranny Discovers America.” After we have discussed in class our analysis of this story, we shall apply the same method to any three stories in the list given below; or to any one of these stories and two stories selected from a volume of contemporary stories by one author; or to one of the first group, one of the second, and a story from a current magazine. For this first exercise it will be well to avoid stories that are complicated in structure and to work only with those that show clearly the pattern on which they are arranged.

**Analyzing the short story.** — In writing down our analyses, moreover, we must be careful to keep everything in terms of structure. All the stories of our selection will surely not be known to all the other members of our group; and if they are to follow us with understanding and interest, our analyses must justify themselves — must “prove” — as they proceed. Before we bring them to the attention of the class, therefore, we should test them to see whether they set forth the structure unmistakably. Does our statement of each point of structure bring into play *both* forces and show their effect on each other? Have we made the relation of turning-point to catastrophe the same as the relation of initial incident to climax? Given the turning-point as we have stated it, is it possible for the class to reconstruct the movement of the forces throughout the story? Can the movement of the forces be plotted correctly from our statement of any one of the other points of structure?

The following stories have been chosen for analysis because they follow the story pattern simply and clearly. In some of them, it had better be said, the falling action is much shorter than the rising action. Indeed, the falling action in the short story is often so short as to be precipitous. This need not, however, puzzle the student who now has an eye solely for the logic of structure and who is not to be misled by any other consideration. The short story often has symmetry, but it need not be the symmetry of a falling action equal in length to the rising action. Why this is not frequently found is obvious: once the reader rounds the turning-point, his mind races ahead, and the pace of the story dare not be so slow as to lose his interest.

The stories for analysis, then, are Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's “Revolt of ‘Mother’ ” (in *A New England Nun*), Alice Brown's “A Day Off” (*A Country Road*), Hamlin Garland's “A Day's Pleasure” (*Main Travelled Roads*), Elizabeth Stewart Cutting's

"The Blossoming Rod" (*Refractory Husbands*), Howard Bru-baker's "Breaking Out of Society" (*Ranny*), and Thyra Samter Winslow's "City Folks" (*Picture Frames*).

The short story is so popular a form to-day that it is scarcely necessary to compile an exhaustive — and exhausting — list of authors. In the short list just given, writers predominate who have made themselves familiar with some province of the American countryside from the farms of New England to the prairies of the Middle West. Students who wish to see how material of this sort has been handled may go not only to Alice Brown, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Hamlin Garland, but also to Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, Margaret Deland, Norman Duncan, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and Margaret Lynn. City streets are the background in most of the stories of Edna Ferber and Fanny Hurst. Society of many different degrees and kinds of sophistication furnishes characters and settings for F. Scott Fitzgerald, Katherine Fullerton Gerould, Katherine Mansfield, Leonard Merrick, Anne Douglas Sedgwick, and Edith Wharton. A simpler life of suburban homes and small communities is drawn in Elizabeth Stewart Cutting's collections, in Inez Haynes Gilmore's *Phæbe and Ernest* stories, and in some of the stories of Kathleen Norris. Writers who intend to make children their principal characters will probably wish to make the acquaintance of Josephine Dodge Daskam Bacon's Philip and others, J. J. Bell's little Scotch boy, Howard Bru-baker's Ranny, Kenneth Grahame's imaginative English young-sters, Elizabeth Jordan's convent school girls, George Madden Martin's Emmy Lou, and Booth Tarkington's Penrod.

These authors, and many others, prospective writers of the short story will explore for themselves. They will range the pages of the current magazines from A for *Atlantic Monthly* to S for *Saturday Evening Post* — and farther. Some maga-zines, notably the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*, offer special



rates for students. Here, as in their earlier reading, the first question they should ask about any story is, in the words of Henry James, "Is it 'a personal, a direct impression of life'? Has it the note, the accent of reality?" If it has not this but is a fairy-tale for grown-up children, it need be none the worse for that, although it is not to our purpose now, provided always that it does not sail under false colors, pretending to be a true account of life.

**Statement of the structural points of our story.** — After we have discussed in class as many analyses as we seem to need, both to confirm and deepen our impression of the structure of the short story and also to recall to our mind by association a wealth of detail from our own experience of life that we might not otherwise have brought to bear upon our own short stories, let us proceed to elaborate our statement of the central struggle of our story into a more detailed statement of its structural points. Again we must test our structure by asking ourselves whether the train of events begun with the initial incident reaches its logical height at the climax and whether the direction given it at the turning-point is continued consistently to the catastrophe. Our statement should be sufficiently detailed to enable the class to follow the story. Perhaps the following statement will show about how much is necessary:

In the *initial incident*, Sylvia and Charlotte, the twins, come upon a theme which their older sister Molly, a senior in high school, has written about them. Each finds something about her character or her habits which she hotly resents. Above all, the twins hate to be coupled as they are in the theme, because in real life every one takes one for the other. Molly only laughs and will not take the "children" seriously.

The *action rises* through scenes in which the twins rummage through Molly's desk and find a description in which they are again coupled and an outline for a rather uncomplimentary story about them. Molly, angry at their invasion of her desk, threatens reprisals.

The *climax* is reached when, after a trying day in high school, during which they have been several times mistaken for each other, the high school *Banner* is found to have a humorous article treating the hated subject as though it were a joke. They decide to make things very uncomfortable for Molly, even to the extent of not inviting her to their class dance, although they belong to "sister" classes. Molly is amazed and hurt that they should carry their resentment as far as this, and declares that she will not have anything to do with them.

The *turning-point* is reached at the dance. The boy who is most popular in the high school, the football hero whom they have been longing to know, singles them out and asks to be introduced to them. He tells them that he is in Molly's English class and that he wants to know them because of the entertaining things that Molly has written about them. Through her realistic descriptions, moreover, he has no difficulty in telling them apart.

During the *falling action* they make attempts at a reconciliation with Molly, and the *catastrophe* comes when they persuade her to write something more about them.

It is evident that the twins rather than Molly will be the center of this story. This is a point that should be clear, even in these preliminary statements. We must ask ourselves, therefore: "Which of the two forces in our story is to receive the emphasis? Whose story is it? Is our attention to be focused on Mother or on Father, Abigail or Jonathan, Molly or the twins?"

### RANNY DISCOVERS AMERICA <sup>1</sup>

*By Howard Brubaker*

On a Thursday afternoon late in May the United States government, which had hovered vaguely over Ranny's horizon for eight-going-on-nine years, came down and began to dabble in his personal affairs. This was amazing conduct on the part of a government which was something like a flag and the Fourth

<sup>1</sup> *Ranny*, Howard Brubaker. Harper.

of July, and which the teacher talked about on Washington's birthday. Strangest of all, this majestic government revealed itself through the trifling person of Bud Hicks, a contemporary of Ranny's, who lived right there in Lakeville and who was a notoriously poor speller.

Ranny and Bud were coming home from school together, but because the grass was so warm and green and inviting they were not making rapid progress.

Bud, in the act of inverting himself and standing on his hands, dropped some valuables out of his coat pocket — a piece of shoemaker's wax, two moss-agates, and a letter. Before Bud could get back into the position intended by nature Ranny had seized upon the letter. It was duly stamped, canceled, and postmarked, and was addressed, miraculously, to Mr. Raymond Hicks — "Raymond" being the stylish name by which Bud was known to his mother and teacher.

"Gimme my letter," Bud commanded as he gathered up his other treasures.

"Where'd you get it?" asked Ranny, complying.

"In the post-office."

"Yes, you did," Ranny said.

"I bet you a thousand dollars!" exclaimed Bud, adding, without waiting for his offer to be accepted: "I answered a ad. in a magazine. If you get five 'scriptions you get a air-gun." In proof of his statement Bud displayed a lifelike portrait of the weapon. "Le's go an' see if they is any more mail."

Ranny, deeply impressed, assented. He had often gone to the post-office on pleasant Sunday mornings with father, but he had never before thought of the institution as having any direct interest to boys.

"Who owns the post-office?" he asked, as they started away.

"Nobody don't own it, you crazy," Bud replied, scornfully.

"It belongs to the gov'ment."



"You mean the *gover'ment*," said Ranny, glad to find a rift in Bud's armor. Just the same, he felt a respect for Bud Hicks which he would never before have believed possible. Bud, though still of tender years, had a letter from the government's post-office; it had his name on it, and a stamp with George Washington's picture. It seemed to Ranny that in some mysterious way this short, curly-haired boy had joined the United States, while he, Randolph Harrington Dukes, was still, as the teacher had said on the day he spelled the great President's name "Lincon," a kind of foreigner.

There was no mail for either of them at the post-office, and the man in the window winked annoyingly over their heads at an adult who stood behind them; but one very important thing happened. In the post-office they met Tom Rucker, who displayed a letter alleged to be from a cousin in Manchester. So it seemed that Tom, also, was on speaking-terms with the government. Ranny began to wonder how far this thing had gone.

"Does everybody get letters in the post-office?" he asked as he and his companion were setting out for home.

"Sure they do," Bud replied. "Except Chinymen; they can't read." This last remark was suggested by the sight of the Chinese laundry which they were passing.

"Chinymen eats rats," said Ranny, and by a mutual impulse they slipped around to the side-window of the laundry and peeked in, as they had often done before, half hoping, half fearing that they might find the Chinaman preparing his favorite dish. When the laundryman caught sight of them they ran very fast, because it is a well-known fact that Chinamen cut off boys' ears.

But though post-offices, governments, and Chinamen were for the time forgotten in the joy of stealing a ride on the back of Alleston's delivery-wagon and the rapture of being chased off,

these matters weighed heavily on Ranny's mind when he reached home. He had an impulse to ask mother a few questions, but she seemed to be too busy with the baby and the supper to give out information upon affairs of state. By six-o'clock-whistle time, when, with face and hands washed and hair patted down, he sat on the front porch waiting for father to come home from the shop, he had firmly resolved that by some means he must have a letter from the post-office and get in touch with the government. He would speak to father without delay. Father knew all about the government; Ranny had heard him tell Mr. Jennings that the government had fallen into the hands of "the interests."

So absorbed was Ranny with his new idea, that, before he knew it, father, pretending not to know it was the right house, had walked past the gate and had to be scampered after and brought back. As Ranny held fast to father's hard, knotty hand and tried to match his long-legged strides, he realized that the present was no time for questions, because when mother with a white apron on is in the doorway waiting to be kissed, father's conversation is apt to be sketchy and unsatisfactory.

Not until supper was over, and father in his rocking-chair on the front porch had begun to hold the evening paper close to his eyes in the thickening dusk, did Ranny feel that the time was ripe to put his new idea into words. He was seated on the floor by the step where he could reach over at any time and pull father's trouser leg for dramatic emphasis.

"Bud Hicks got a letter," he said by way of opening the conversation with a bang.

Father grunted in that annoying way adults have of answering without paying attention.

"It's about a air-gun," Ranny continued.

That weapon brought father's paper down at once.

"No air-guns, Ranny," he said; "they're dangerous. I'll

make you a gun out of a broomstick." Thereupon he closed the interview by raising the paper again.

Ranny, seeing that the conversation had gone astray, made a desperate effort to recover it.

"Father," he said, with a tug at the "emphasizer," "I wish I —"

"Randolph!"

Father seldom resorted to the stern form of the name, and, now that he did, the boy stood unjustly convicted of the high crime of teasing. Apparently this was one of those problems that had to be worked out without the aid of parents.

Remembering Bud's route to citizenship, Ranny went into the sitting-room to see if there was some magazine that would be of help. But the only periodical which the Dukes' home contained, upon examination, was *The Wagon-Maker*, a publication which father seemed to find interesting, but which offered no aid in the present crisis. True, it contained an advertisement of real estate near Long Island Sound, but a haziness upon the meaning of real estate made it seem best not to "write for particulars." Better abandon the magazine idea entirely, he thought, than to run the risk of landing himself, and perhaps father and mother and the baby, in prison.

In the quiet darkness of his room that night Ranny tossed to and fro on an uneasy bed, wide-eyed, gazing on the goal of his desire. He could think of no cousins in Manchester or elsewhere who would send letters to him; it would be years before the baby would be of letter-writing age. Sleep put an end to these reflections, but day streaming through his window brought an inspiration. At the noon hour he hastened to Bud Hicks for co-operation.

"I tell you what le's do," he said. "You write a letter to me and I'll write a letter to you. We'll mail 'em in the post-office."



"I ain't got no money," Bud replied.

"I could get four cents, easy," Ranny said, boastfully.

However, Bud, clinging to his monopoly, refused to have a part in any such plan.

"They wouldn't be reg'lar letters," he said, fondling his own grimy and desirable envelope.

"Aw," said Ranny, "you think you're smart with your dirty old letter." The interview degenerated into an exchange of sticks and small stones as they went their separate ways.

In his search for another correspondent that afternoon Ranny met with nothing but discouragement and ridicule. "Fatty" Hartman, who sat across the aisle, was not interested in his government at all.

"You could *tell* it to me," he said, inanely, in reply to the proposal. "Why should you write me a letter?"

At recess-time "Fatty" told the joke to Bud Hicks, who repeated it to most of the other boys in the class amid widespread snickering.

"He's only trying to copy after me," said Bud, displaying his own poor apology for a letter.

Tom Rucker, whose humor always took a practical turn, increased the general hilarity by pouring water down Ranny's neck. After school there were further persecutions. Bud, suddenly remembering the conversation of the previous day, advanced the theory that Ranny was a Chinaman. The other boys adopted it gleefully, and the crowd that was gathered about a marble game in the open space back of the Methodist church greeted him as "pigtail." As Ranny slipped away he heard one boy call out, "He's goin' home to eat rats."

That night after supper Ranny sat on the front step in deep despondency. He seemed further from his patriotic goal than ever; there was not a boy in the class who would write him a letter now. Mother came out of the house and with a sigh of

relief sank to the step by his side and laid a tired hand upon his own. Putting away the paper and lighting a cigar, father became human and jovial. An electric light on the corner came to life with a hiss, and mother pointed out how beautifully it glowed through the green of the new leaves. A young girl chattered somewhere in the shadows, just as girls do on the way home from school.

Suddenly a desperate thought came to Ranny. Why not exchange letters with a girl? Of course he would not dare to show the contents of the envelope to anybody, but surely it would be better to have a letter from a girl than never to get into government circles at all.

The next day Ranny took the matter up with Josie Kendal, who sat in front of him. Except when he pulled her hair, Josie always listened to him and laughed at his jokes. Josie's writing was queer and she probably cared nothing about the government, but the time for being particular had passed.

"Say, Josie," he whispered, "if I write you a letter, will you write me a letter?"

Josie giggled, but did not commit herself.

"I mean reg'lar letters in the post-office," Ranny went on, "with stamps an' everything."

Josie turned around and looked at Ranny with serious inquiry in her blue eyes. "What should I write to you, Ranny?" she asked.

"Josie, turn around, please!" Miss Mills said, sharply, to the great amusement of "Fatty" Hartman.

"I'll write you a letter," Ranny whispered when conversation seemed safe once more, "and you can answer it."

Josie bobbed her pigtails in assent.

Ranny hurried home that afternoon so fast that when he arrived there mother said, "My gracious!" and looked at the clock.

"Mother," said Ranny, "I wish you'd give me two cents."

"What do you want it for?" mother asked.

"Oh, somethin'," Ranny replied, fumbling with a button on his coat.

After searching through some coins in a baking-powder can, mother produced the required amount. Putting the pennies in his pocket, Ranny went to the writing-desk in the sitting-room and got an envelope, a tablet, and a pencil. At last he stood face to face with the problem that had been giving him trouble all day. What should he write to Josie? None of the usual remarks about "Fatty" Hartman's fatness or the teacher's crossness or Josie's pigtails and freckles seemed suited to the demands of that great mysterious government. But as he stood reflectively chewing his pencil, suddenly the whole difficulty was cleared away. On a shelf in the combination book-case-desk, between *The Story of Man* and *The Treasury of Golden Thoughts*, was a volume that showed you how to do everything properly. In this hitherto useless book were letters already written out; Ranny had only to copy one, sign his name to it, and mail it to Josie. To avoid questions he withdrew with his task to the "secret den," which parents and other ill-informed adults spoke of as the woodshed.

This structure, which adjoined the kitchen, did, as a matter of fact, contain wood, also a tool-bench, a discarded bedstead, and the remains of a clock. In one corner there was a small inclosure constructed of boxes by father's help, and devoted to Ranny's own purposes. Sometimes it was a robber's cave, sometimes a drug-store, and it was always a picture-gallery for color work of a humorous nature. To-day it looked like one of those advertisements which invite you to "study drawing at home"; for Ranny had hit upon a fine device. One letter in the book was printed in script, and Ranny was tracing it with a lead-pencil over a carbon paper that had come with



his Christmas drawing set. The result revealed Ranny as a flawless penman and an inveterate letter-writer — except for the signature and the address on the envelope. He would try to get down to the post-office and mail the letter at noon the next day; for the evening he had nothing to do except to reach into his pocket from time to time to see that the letter was safe.

The next forenoon, just by way of assuring Josie that everything was going along without a hitch, he poked her respectfully in the back and gave her a glimpse of the envelope, concealed from the public gaze by the covers of his geography. Josie giggled gratifyingly and put back her hand.

“Let me look at it,” she whispered.

Ranny started to comply, keeping his eye on the teacher, but at this moment Bud Hicks, who was evidently watching the proceedings, gave an appreciative cough. The teacher’s eye swept over the room. Josie, alarmed, withdrew her hand, and the letter fell into the aisle. Ranny dropped back into the position of one deeply concerned about the Orinoco River, but the teacher was beside his desk in an instant, asking him to pick up the letter.

“Did you write that, Randolph?” Miss Mills asked, noting the address.

“Yes, ma’am,” he replied, with a sinking heart.

“Did you write to him first, Josie?”

Josie’s braids bobbed emphatic denial, and she looked at Ranny as though she had never before noticed that he sat behind her.

Ranny had a fleeting fear that Miss Mills was going to open the letter; a moment later he was sorry she had not. It is doubtful if anybody but a teacher could have thought of the scheme that she immediately unfolded.

“Miss Kendal,” she said, with an ironical bow, “this is your letter. Please open it and copy it in full on the blackboard.

The gentleman who thinks this is a post-office will kindly stay after school and learn better."

Ranny heard a muffled snicker back of him somewhere and felt his ears growing hot. He had a sensation as of eyes sticking into him from all directions, and he knew that to meet "Fatty" Hartman's gaze would be disastrous. He wished he was out in the open air; he wished he had a drink of water.

Finally Josie finished her task and was allowed to take her seat. Ranny had a new sinking of the heart when he realized how his work had suffered from Josie's ruinous scrawl. Miss Mills, who had been busy suppressing outbreaks of lawlessness, now read the message over, wrinkling up her brows in perplexity. The letter was as follows:

DEAR SIR: — Your esteemed favor of the seventh inst. at hand, and in reply will state that we have this day forwarded to your address the following mdse., for which we hand you invoices herewith, subject to 5% 10 days, or 4% 30 days.

9 bbls. flour No. 7B,  
18 cwt. lime,  
1 hgds. Orleans molasses,  
100 lbs. leaf lard.

Thanking you for your valued order and anticipating a continuance of your patronage, we beg to remain,

Yours very respectfully,  
RANDOLPH HARRINGTON DUKES.

Upon reading this letter Miss Mills was seized with a violent fit of coughing and had to take refuge in a handkerchief and a glass of water. To Ranny this was a welcome reprieve, as though he had arrived at the dentist's and found him occupied with another patient.

"You may give me that letter, Josie," she said at last. "The children will please remember that this is not the place" — another cough — "for business transactions. The class in geography!"

That ordeal over, Ranny began to hope that the interview at noon might also pass without physical violence. At any rate, he thought, as the other pupils filed out with grins in his direction, he would escape the scoffing public opinion in the street below.

Miss Mills's first question as she leaned against "Fatty" Hartman's desk and looked down upon Ranny with searching, puzzled eyes, was reassuring.

"Where did you write this letter, Ranny?"

"At home."

"But this isn't your handwriting," she exclaimed, as she looked at the contents of the envelope for the first time.

Ranny enlightened her as to the carbon-paper device.

"And you brought it to school to give it to Josie?"

"I was going to take it to the post-office," he explained, laboriously producing two cents as proof. Even now, in one of life's crises, he found himself wondering whether it wouldn't be well to spend the money for all-day-suckers.

"Ranny," said the teacher, "you are telling me the truth I know; but why did you want to write to Josie? Is she —"

Ranny recognized the silly adult idea from afar and forestalled it.

"I want to get a letter from the post-office, and Josie said she would answer," he said, earnestly. "I want to belong to the gover'nment like Washington an' Lincoln. I never get any letters. You said I was a foreigner, an' the boys call me Chiny-man an' everything."

The teacher seemed at last to understand. She dismissed Ranny with the confusing impression that he had not done anything wrong, but that he mustn't do it again. Just as he was leaving the room he looked back, and there was Miss Mills at her desk, her face very serious as she gazed thoughtfully at the window.



This scene was but the foretaste of a long, hard, painful afternoon. "Fatty" Hartman, whenever the teacher's back was turned, made violent motions, as of one writing letters. Once Bud Hicks succeeded in catching his eye with a libelous caricature on his slate, labeled, "Ranny and Josie." That young person was scornful; to a friendly tug on her hair she responded by elevating her nose and pulling her braids over her shoulder to safety, indicating to a gleeful world that her latch-string was no longer out to Randolph Harrington Dukes. The long school-day expired in gloom. He had tried everything and failed. He might have been a Spaniard, for all the good the United States was to him.

Leaving the other boys at the school-yard gate, Ranny set off for home through Carrington's alley. But his tormentors were not to be evaded so easily.

"Hey, Bob, there goes your girl," he heard Bud call out. Bud, followed by a number of trouble-seekers, caught up with Ranny at the intersection of the two alleys. Ranny, clenching his fists, turned and faced his enemy.

"Aw, let me alone," he said. "What's the matter with you?"

Bud, encouraged by the shouts of the boys behind him, ignored Ranny's threatening attitude, and crowded up close. "Pig-tail Chinyman!" he said, tauntingly.

Nobody was more surprised at what followed than Ranny himself; his fist flew out and landed solidly on Bud's chin. As if encouraged by its partner's success, the other fist traveled straight to Bud's stomach. In the next instant Ranny found himself lying flat upon his prostrate enemy.

"Pull 'im off, kids!" Bud gasped, but nobody moved; Bud's side of the controversy seemed suddenly to have grown unpopular.

"One fella at a time," said "Fatty" Hartman.

Ranny pressed one hand, not gently, over Bud's face and

with the other succeeded in reaching the letter in Bud's pocket. Thereupon, still sitting securely upon Bud's wriggling form, he stowed the letter away in his own pocket.

"Who's a Chinyman now?" Ranny asked.

"Let me up," Bud sputtered in a tone of surrender.

Ranny released his beaten foe, took the cap that Tom Rucker handed him, and let "Fatty" Hartman brush some dust off of his knee. Nobody called him names now.

"It's all right for you!" Bud said as he started off alone. All the other boys laughed.

But when the excitement was over and Ranny sat alone in the "secret den," his depression returned. He had disposed of Bud Hicks and stopped the jeering, but he was just as far from being a good American as ever. The "secret den" presently changed to a drug-store, wobbled awhile between a robber's cave and a picture-gallery, and ended — sure sign of a disordered universe — as a plain woodshed.

The six-o'clock whistle was a welcome sound that evening, and when the dingy hat appeared, bobbing up and down along Webber's picket fence, Ranny was down the path like an arrow. But father, curiously, did not boost him to his shoulder or pull the too-big hat down over Ranny's ears. Instead he acted strangely, stopping and gazing thoughtfully at the house, more like a tall, thin book-agent than a father.

"Young man," he said, "perhaps you can tell me where I can find a person by the name of"—here he consulted an envelope that he had drawn from his pocket—"Randolph Harrington Dukes?"

With a wild half-hope Ranny flashed an inquiry up at father's face and pounced upon the envelope. It came upon him in a burst of glory — stamp, postmark, and, in a handwriting that was faintly familiar, strange and wonderful in their new dignity, the words, "Randolph Harrington Dukes, City."

Clasping the letter tightly, Ranny went dancing and skipping up the path to bring mother the joyful news. She came out of the house wiping her hands on her apron so that she might examine the letter. Instead of getting ready for supper, father sat down and looked expectant. It was the general opinion that the letter should be opened, so Ranny intrusted it to father, who read in his best "company" tone:

DEAR RANNY, — When vacation begins, next Thursday, I shall be packing my trunk to go away. I want you, if you can, to come to my boarding-house in the morning and run some errands for me. Then maybe you will help about my plan. I am looking for a bright American boy about eight years old, who writes a good hand and knows about Washington and Lincoln, to exchange letters with me this summer. I have lots of stamps. Maybe you would like to do it. I am going first to Washington city, where the government is, and I will write you a letter from there.

Your friend,

Here father pretended that he could not make out the signature and asked for a loan of mother's eyes. Ranny had to bombard father's knee to get the letter. It was signed by — "Edith Mills."

Randolph Harrington Dukes, City, sat on the gate-post after supper, dangling bare, white legs and ruling over a smiling June universe. Foremost in his thoughts was the United States government, fathered by Washington, saved by Lincoln, and now fallen into the hands of "the interests." He would have to ask father about "the interests" one of these days; in fact, there were many things he would have to learn about the government — now.

"I'll give Bud back his letter to-morrow," he said to himself, "and show him mine."

The level rays of the setting sun touched the new-green leaves with flame, splashed liquid gold upon the bowed bare



head of the wondering little boy. His eyes rested proudly upon the breast-pocket of his faded blue jacket; there it gleamed where all the passing world might see, his badge of citizenship — a white envelope and a red stamp.

“Red, white, and blue,” said Ranny with a patriotic thrill at the discovery. “It’s something like the Fourth of July.”

## CHAPTER XV

### PRESENTATION: THE DRAMATIC TYPE OF STORY

**Dramatic presentation.** — Just as most short stories resemble the drama in type of structure, so too do they resemble the drama in method of presentation. The method of the drama is to set the story itself on a stage before an audience and to let it speak for itself. The playwright cannot himself come forward to explain, to summarize, or to moralize. In a scene or in a series of scenes he must let his play-story present itself through the movement, the gesture, the facial expression, and the speech of the characters in the story. So it is, for the most part, with the short-story writer. He too presents his material in a scene or in a series of scenes throughout which the people of his story talk and act; he too usually lets his story tell itself without interruption from him for the purpose of expository comment. But the story teller, unlike the playwright, has the power, if he insists on taking it, of stalking like a showman through his story, dotting its i's and crossing its t's. Imagine the simple sort of story that most beginners are likely to write, and then imagine it underlined with the author's comment, — his unnecessary elucidation of what needed no explanation, his superfluous moralization. These interpolations are so irritating that the helpless reader wishes the story teller in the grip of the insuperable limitation imposed on the playwright by the exigency of his medium. If he is wise, the beginner will voluntarily subject himself to the discipline of the playwright and use the method of drama.

He has, however, one useful possibility of method over and above what the playwright has at his command. The playwright cannot make transitions. The curtain cuts his play into scenes separated by the intervals between the acts. What happens in the play-story in these intervals he cannot summarize for his audience. It is a delicate problem of his art to get this necessary information to the audience without seeming to do so. The story writer, on the other hand, may use a plain and simple method, without any disguise. Like the playwright, he first decides which of the parts of his story need to be presented in scenes; and then, unlike the playwright, he may recount the rest of the story briefly in short passages between the scenes.

Let us think of our own story in this light. Which parts of our story may the reader rightly demand to have presented before him in full? Which parts will he be content, for the sake of economy of time and attention, to have recounted for him briefly? Obviously, at least the important structural points of our story insist on presentation in scenes. Beyond this, for each story there will have to be decided the right combination of presented scenes and recounted action.

**The scene-plan.** — This is our next step. But before we take it, let us turn to our short-story guides and see how they have solved similar problems. We may take one story that impresses us as a particularly good piece of work and write out an analysis of it, indicating in some detail the scenes and the transitions between them. For each scene we shall want to know (1) when and where it takes place, (2) what characters take part in it, (3) what relation it bears to the progress of the story, and (4) how the transition to the next scene is effected. Is it a change in time or a change of place that ends one scene and leads to another? Or does an important change in the members of the group of characters make us feel that one scene



ends and another begins? Does the story-writer bridge the gap between this scene and the next with a short transition, only a sentence — perhaps only a phrase? Or does he write a long passage of recounted action? Or does he do neither, but resort to the mechanical device of numbering the parts of his story, or leaving spaces between them?

**The running scene.** — A difficulty that is a little puzzling at first in making an analysis of this sort is what we may call the running scene, in which one character so dominates the story that although the scene moves with her, perhaps from school-room to street and from street to home, and there from living-room to bedroom, in an otherwise uninterrupted stream of action, we feel that it is, for all its change of place, one scene and we call it one scene in our scene-plan.

**Scene-plan of a selected story.** — Let us analyze a few scenes of a story, in order that we may realize just how much detail we should put into our scene-plan and just what form it may take. We may choose "White Bread" by Zona Gale, and read the first two or three scenes.

## WHITE BREAD<sup>1</sup>

*By Zona Gale*

Every one in the room had promised something. Mis' Tyrus Burns offered her receipt for filled cookies.

"My filled cookie receipt," she said, "is something that very, very few have ever got out of me. I give it to Mis' Bradford — when she moved away. I've give it to one or two of my kin — by word of mouth and not wrote down. And Carol Beck had it from me when she was married — wrote out on note-paper, formal — but understood to be a personal receipt and not general

<sup>1</sup>"White Bread," Zona Gale. *Harper's Monthly*, July, 1916.

at all. This'll be the first time I've ever give in to make it public, and nothing on earth but the church carpet would make me now."

"Me either, with my Christmas cakes," said Mis' Arthur Port. "I've made 'em for fairs and bazaars and suppers, and give the material when I needed it for the children's shoes, but I feel like the time had come for the real supreme sacrifice. I'll put 'em in the book with the rest of you."

Mis' Older's salad-dressing, Mis' Eldred's fruit cordial, Mis' Regg's mince-meat, Mis' Emmons's pie-crust — these were all offered up. The basement dining-room of the church was filled with women that spring afternoon, and a spirit was moving among them like a little flame, kindling each one to giving. The place in which they were gathered, its furnace in the corner, its reed melodeon for the Sunday-school, its blackboards, and its locked cupboards filled with dishes which the women had earned when a like flame quickened — this place might have been an austere height where they were face to face with the ultimate purpose of giving, of being. For abruptly children's shoes, parlor curtains, the little hoard accumulating "overback" on a cupboard shelf became as nothing, and the need to be of use was on them all, like a cry involuntarily answered to a cry. . . .

Save only one. Mis' Jane Mellish sat by the serving-pantry door, no more self-forgetful than when she was in her own kitchen.

"What's the book going to be called?" she had asked when they had voted to prepare it.

"The Katy Town First Church Ladies' Choice Receipt Book," they had finally decided.

"How can you call it that if it ain't all the ladies?" Jane had inquired further. "Some o' the ladies 'ain't got a choice receipt to their names nor their brains."

"Such as 'ain't can see to the printing," Mis' Tyrus Burns

suggested. "Would you druther do that, Jane?" she added, tartly.

Jane's lips moved before she spoke — a little helpless way that they had, as if they were not equal to what they must do. "Who's going to write the dedication?" she asked.

No one had thought of a dedication, but it occurred to no one to question it. And the answer was inevitable.

"You'd ought to do that," they said to Jane. For who else of their number had ever published poems in the *Katy Town Epitome*, and whom else had its editor asked to "do special funeral and wedding write-ups"?

Jane nodded and hid her relief, and presently faced the question which all along she had been dreading:

"Now, bread. We'd ought to have some real special breads," they said. "Who's going to do them?"

Mis' Holmes's salt-rising bread, Mis' Jacobs's potato-bread, Mis' Grace's half-graham-and-half-rye — these were all offered. It was Mis' Tyrus Burns who said that which they were all thinking. She turned to Jane Mellish.

"Land! Jane," she said, "what it'd be to have your white-bread receipt for our volume!"

At this a hush fell, and they looked at Jane. For years her white-bread receipt had baffled them all. Nobody made white bread like Jane, and no one could find out how she made it — whether by flour or mixing, or, as some suspected, a home-made lard, or an unknown baking-powder, or a secret yeast packed in occasional boxes from Jane's relatives oversea. Whatever the process or the component, she kept it. After a few rebuffs, Katy Town understood that the bread was Jane's prerogative. So they praised it to her, and experimented privately, and owned to one another their defeat. No one ever asked Jane any more. When Mis' Tyrus Burns did so, the silence was as if some one had spoken impertinently, or had made an historical refer-



ence too little known to be in good taste, or had quoted poetry.

"I'm going to compose an original dedication," Jane said, stiffly. "I guess, ladies, that's my share."

Mis' Tyrus Burns sighed. "'Most any of us," she said, "could stodge up a dedication to a book. Or we could even go without one, if we just had to. But that white-bread receipt of yours had ought to be in this book by rights, Jane Mellish, with a page all to itself."

Jane was silent. And when little Miss Cold, of her heart's goodness, relieved the moment with, "None of you offered to give my cream cake a page all by itself, I notice," every one laughed gratefully, and spoke no more of Jane's bread.

Jane walked down the street with the others, and she knew of what they were thinking. When she turned alone into her own street under the new buds, she went with a sick defiance, which her elaborate chatter about house-cleaning had only scotched. She left her door open to the friendly evening. The rooms were pleasant and commonplace in the westering light; her dress was to be changed, there was supper to get, her "clothes" had come home and were waiting to be sprinkled; but all these were become secondary to the disturbing thing.

"Mis' Tyrus Burns always did make things disagreeable for everybody," she thought. "Why should she say what bread should go into that book and what bread should stay out of it?"

Grandma Mellish was in the kitchen. She had an airy room of her own, and the "other" room was warm enough for comfort, but she sat in the kitchen. Sometimes she spent wakeful nights there.

"The other furniture bunts out at me," the old lady had said. "I see it's there. In the kitchen I can think things without truck having to be looked at all the time. — Can't I sit where I want?" she would querulously demand of them.

Of late she had been querulous, too, about certain grinning faces on the cook-stove.

"They're makin' fun of what they think you be," she said once. "You can stand there fryin' things, as moral as the minister, but you can't fool them faces. Dum 'em."

She sat in the kitchen now, patching a roller-towel. "Be they done clackin'?" she inquired, as Jane entered.

With the table-cloth in her hand, Jane stooped to her, told her about the book and the new church carpet. "They want I should put my white-bread receipt in," she said.

"The brass!" said Grandma Mellish, shrilly. "The brass!"

"Ain't it?" Jane said, softening to the sympathy, and stopped in her journey from cupboard to table to tell more of the meeting. The old woman listened; she was very bent, and to listen she looked over her stooped shoulder, her lips parted and moving in her effort to follow.

"The brass!" she said again. "That receipt's yours. I don't know how you make it, and I live in the same house with you. They'll want the hair off your head, next. What you goin' to do for their book?"

"It's my book, too," Jane said. "It's our book, I s'pose — it ain't all theirs. I'm going to write the dedication — giving it away on the front page, you know."

"Eh," said Grandma Mellish. "Well, just you make it flowery enough, and put in enough love and heaven, and that had ought to satisfy 'em. They'll want the clothes off your back, next." She broke off and shook her fist at the grinning faces on the cooking-stove. "What you smirkin' at, drat ye?" she inquired.

When supper was ready Jane went out on the porch, and there, in order to be away from the droning voice, she waited for Molly. Molly was late, but Jane was not hungry. The feeling of sick distaste had persisted, so that it was almost physi-

cal nausea; and this the old woman's words, which had at first soothed her, now someway intensified.

What was she caring so much about? she asked herself, indignantly. The bread receipt was hers, and that was all there was to it. It had been brought from the old country by her great-grandmother Osthelder, and had been handed down from mother to daughter. She remembered how jealously it had been guarded by her own mother, who had brought the receipt West with her when she married; and straightway in her home town her bread had become an amazement. Her mother had always made the bread for the Communion services, and so had Jane. In a fortnight more Jane would be making bread for the spring Communion of the First Church.

"I do enough for them — I guess I do enough for them with my receipt," she thought. "Besides, it's Molly's. I 'ain't the right to give away what's Molly's."

Molly, coming from her school, seemed not at all disturbed about her rights. She had been teaching for two years, but she looked like a school-girl herself as she came round the house. She came bareheaded, save for a flutter of white veil on her hair; and she was always like one who is met at a day's beginning, and not at an ending. Only to-night there was a cloud on her face, no larger than the white space between her brows. But her mother saw.

"What is it, Molly?" she asked, but the girl laughed and ran up-stairs and managed to keep off the question until supper was done. She had eaten nothing, however; and Jane had eaten nothing, because that sick sense of something wrong possessed her; only Grandma Mellish ate steadily. "What is it, Molly?" her mother asked again, when the old woman had finished.

"Well, mother darling," Molly said, "Ellen Burns has come back. At least she's sent word she's ready to take the school. They've offered it to me if I want to stay, but —"



"But what?" Jane said, sharply.

"I can't keep it," Molly answered. "It was her school. I was just a supply while she was sick. Now she's well, and she wants it back."

"What's that?" said Grandma Mellish. "Mis' Tyrus Burns's girl's got well? She wants back, after you doin' her work the best o' two years? What's the Board say to that?"

"They haven't met yet," Molly said. "But Nat says he knows I can stay if I like. Only —"

"Well, I should think so," said Grandma Mellish. "It's a good school. You stay. Wants back, does she? The brass!"

Molly looked at her mother, but Jane did not meet her eyes. It would be serious, this loss of the school. There were the three of them, and Molly was the breadwinner. If she were to get no other school next year. . . .

"You've got the good of the school to think of," Jane said. "You must be the best teacher, or Nat wouldn't be so sure of the Board. The good of the school's the main thing."

Molly shook her head. "I don't know about my being a better teacher," she said. "I think if they let me stay it'll be because Nat Commons is president of the Board."

"Nonsense!" her mother said, with vigor. "Just because he's taken you to drive once or twice. Anyway, what if it is so? You like him, don't you? You don't want you should hurt his feelings? If you go he'll think you're running away from him. You've got to think of everything."

Grandma Mellish was wiping her spectacles on her petticoat. "You better keep your cap set for Rufus Commons's son," she said. "He's got his pa's pocket and his grandad's jaw. Don't you leave him slip through your fingers."

Molly rose swiftly and went out on the porch. Her mother's eyes followed her, but she said nothing. As Jane turned back to her work, she was aware that her own dull sense of physical

ill-being had been multiplied, and she felt a weight within, bearing down her chest, changing her breath.

"I've got to get a-hold of myself," she thought. "I guess I'll take a dose of something and get into the bed." . . .

We may set down our analysis as follows:

On a spring afternoon, in the basement of the First Church, the women of Katy Town are gathered to plan the Choice Receipt Book, the sale of which is to buy a new church carpet. Every one in the room has offered up some precious recipe, never made public until now — every one except Mis' Jane Mellish. It is Mis' Tyrus Burns who voices what they are all thinking: "Land! Jane, what it'd be to have your white bread receipt for our volume!" Jane's white bread has baffled them all. Nobody makes white bread like Jane's, and no one can find out how she makes it. But Jane, who is to compose the dedication of the book, takes refuge behind this: "I'm going to compose an original dedication. I guess, ladies, that's my share." The scene ends: "And when little Miss Cold, of her heart's goodness, relieved the moment with, 'None of you offered to give my cream cake a page all by itself, I notice,' every one laughed gratefully, and spoke no more of Jane's bread."

The transition to the next scene begins: "Jane walked down the street with the others, and she knew of what they were thinking. When she turned alone into her own street under the new buds, she went with a sick defiance, which her elaborate chatter about house-cleaning had only scotched." It continues through a bit of description which helps us to realize her rooms, pleasant and commonplace in the spring evening air, and her task of getting supper — all secondary now, however, to her feeling of disturbance.

The second scene opens with Grandma Mellish sitting in the kitchen, patching a roller towel, and it gives us her comment on what Jane, in her journey from cupboard to table, tells her about the meeting. "The brass!" says Grandma Mellish. "That receipt's yours. . . . They'll want the hair off your head next. . . ." It is a short scene, and the transition to the next scene comes soon, beginning, "When supper was ready Jane went out on the porch, and there, in order to be away from the droning voice, she waited for Molly." While she waits, Jane broods over her secret, her white bread receipt,

"brought from the old country by her great-grandmother Osthelder," and "handed down from mother to daughter." Molly comes home from the school where she teaches, and, although her mother sees "a cloud on her face, no larger than the white space between her brows," the girl will not tell what troubles her until supper is done.

Then the third scene opens with "'What is it, Molly?' her mother asked again, when the old woman had finished." Molly tells them that Ellen Burns, the girl who had taught the Katy Town school and who had left the year before because of illness, is better and wants the school again. The Board has offered the school to Molly if she will stay, but Molly feels that she cannot keep it: "I was just a supply while she was sick." Grandma Mellish thinks Molly should keep her school: "You stay. Wants back, does she? The brass!" Jane thinks of what the loss of the school will mean to them, but what she says is "You've the good of the school to think of," and when Molly shakes her head and answers, "I think if they let me stay it'll be because Nat Commons is president of the Board," her mother says again, "You like him, don't you? You don't want to hurt his feelings? . . . You've got to think of everything"; to which Grandma Mellish adds, "You better keep your cap set for Rufus Commons's son. . . . Don't you leave him slip through your fingers." The scene ends with Molly's going out on the porch and her mother's turning back to her work with her sense of ill-being multiplied.

Before the next scene the writer leaves a space, after which she brings Mis' Tyrus Burns round to find Molly on the porch and to tell her what happened at the meeting. The story goes on, tracing Jane's attitude toward the two problems. Because of this twofold interest, the plot is more complicated than those that we have been considering, but the issue emerges clearly enough. What we have given of scene-plan shows what seems to be the most helpful way of writing it. It should be as detailed as this because the story teller should never get into the habit of thinking of his story in any but the most concrete terms, even when he is writing a summary of it. An abstract scene-plan often leads to a baldly told story. And as this scene-plan of some one else's story is only a preliminary to



the scene-plan of our own story, we are writing it in the manner that we shall at once use for our own. Since this is still, however, a scene-plan of some one else's story, it may be admitted, in passing, that it may not be exactly the scene-plan that the writer of the story had in mind; it may not be in detail the scene-plan that every reader would outline for the story. Many differences in analysis are possible. One reader, for example, may designate as a concretely written part of a passage between scenes what another may consider a short scene in itself. Such differences should not disturb us. In fact, they are salutary, rather than otherwise, for they remind us that there is nothing sacrosanct about this analysis or about any of the forms into which our study of writing puts itself. That we analyze at all is merely incidental in our process of learning how to write.

**Value of this analysis.** — Our scene-plan and the scene-plans of our neighbors will have given us a knowledge of the sort of phrase or sentence or longer passage that practiced writers use in traveling from scene to scene. It will not be a bad prop for a beginner to have in his notebook a few examples of phrases and sentences that indicate lapse of time, change of place, and change in grouping of characters. These may serve as a reminder that usually these transitions should stand out in the story as little as a seam in a dress; they should be deftly inconspicuous. This dexterity, however, is important only because the lack of it hampers both writer and reader. What the scene-plan can give us that is of much more importance is a feeling for the molding of scenes on the structural pattern. For this, no rules can be formulated. We may say that the scenes should not take long leaps in time or place, but this is already implied in our conception of the short story. Beyond this, we may say that some stories have a most exact symmetry of scene, only to note immediately that others, just as good,

have not. "A Day Off," for example, is a story not of one day, but of two days, each beginning with early morning and ending with going to bed at night, — the first, however, proceeding from the defeat of Abigail's desire to make a cake to the unhappy end of a day of thwarted plans; the second going forward from Abigail's triumphant cracking of two eggs in her cake-making to the happy ending of a day that has brought Clary what she wished. But for one story like this, we may find, without looking far for them, a dozen stories that have no such symmetry. Nor can we say that successive scenes must be, if not symmetrical, at least similar, because, although Thyra Samter Winslow successfully continues at dinner the discussion that her "City Folks" began at breakfast, many beginners manage to get nothing but monotony from such an arrangement. No, we can fashion no hard-and-fast rules; but we can, from our careful examination of stories that hold our interest, gain a feeling for a succession of scenes that shall tell our story as we want it told and shall, in turn, hold the interest of our readers.

**Writing our scene-plan.** — Thus we proceed to write the scene-plan of our own story and then to bring it to class for comment and suggestion. This scene-plan should be less an outline of something that is still to be written and more a setting down of what has already been acted out in our minds. On our way to and from class, in the half-hour before we get to sleep at night, at odd minutes during the day, the people of our story should be with us. We should hear what they say and see what they do. We should be shaping their life into the scenes of our story. Our scene-plan, accordingly, will be a record of a drama that has been acted or is being acted, not a theoretical diagram of something that has as yet no existence. In this record, it is as well not to attempt to write out transitional passages word for word, as we have done for

the stories of others, but merely to indicate the nature of the transition, if this is not sufficiently suggested by the scenes themselves. For the story will, like all our writing, gain a certain momentum and will swing into a certain rhythm of its own when we are engaged in the actual process of writing it, and what this is we cannot be sure of until the time of writing comes.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SCENE

**The scene itself.** — We are ready now to begin writing our story. And as we are thinking of it as a succession of scenes and as it is possible that our very beginning may be a scene, we first examine a scene closely to see how it is put together. We may take a scene that shows this very simply and clearly, a scene from Booth Tarkington's *Seventeen*,<sup>1</sup> which, although it does not open a short story, might very well do so.

“Will-ee!”

To William, in his high and lonely mood, this piercing summons brought an actual shudder, and the very thought of Jane (with tokens of apple sauce and sugar still upon her cheek, probably) seemed a kind of sacrilege. He fiercely swore his favorite oath, acquired from the hero of a work of fiction he admired, “Ye gods!” and concealed his poem in the drawer of the writing-table, for Jane’s footsteps were approaching his door.

“Will-ee! Mamma wants you.” She tried the handle of the door.

“G’way!” he said.

“Will-ee!” Jane hammered upon the door with her fist.  
“Will-ee!”

“What you want?” he shouted.

Jane explained, certain pauses indicating that her attention was partially diverted to another slice of bread-and-butter and apple sauce and sugar. “Will-ee, mamma wants you — wants you to go help Genesis bring some wash-tubs home — and a tin clo’es-boiler — from the second-hand man’s store.”

“*What!*”

Jane repeated the outrageous message, adding, “She wants you

<sup>1</sup> *Seventeen*, Booth Tarkington. Harper.

to hurry — and I got some more bread-and-butter and apple sauce and sugar for comin' to tell you."

William left no doubt in Jane's mind about his attitude in reference to the whole matter. His refusal was direct and infuriated, but, in the midst of a multitude of plain statements which he was making, there was a decisive tapping upon the door at a point higher than Jane could reach, and his mother's voice interrupted:

"Hush, Willie! Open the door, please."

He obeyed furiously, and Mrs. Baxter walked in with a deprecating air, while Jane followed, so profoundly interested that, until almost the close of the interview, she held her bread-and-butter and apple sauce and sugar at a sort of way-station on its journey to her mouth.

"That's a nice thing to ask me to do!" stormed the unfortunate William. "Ye gods! Do you think Joe Bullitt's mother would dare to —"

"Wait, dearie!" Mrs. Baxter begged, pacifically. "I just want to explain —"

"Explain! Ye gods!"

"Now, now, just a minute, Willie!" she said. "What I wanted to explain was why it's necessary for you to go with Genesis for the —"

"Never!" he shouted. "Never! You expect me to walk through the public streets with that awful-lookin' old nigger —"

"Genesis isn't old," she managed to interpolate. "He —"

But her frantic son disregarded her. "Second-hand wash-tubs!" he vociferated. "And tin clothes-boilers! *That's* what you want your *son* to carry through the public streets in broad daylight! Ye gods!"

"Well, there isn't anybody else," she said. "Please don't rave so, Willie, and say 'Ye gods' so much; it really isn't nice. I'm sure nobody'll notice you —"

"'Nobody'!" His voice cracked in anguish. "Oh no! Nobody except the whole town! *Why*, when there's anything disgusting has to be done in this family — why do *I* always have to be the one? Why can't Genesis bring the second-hand wash-tubs without *me*? Why can't the second-hand store deliver 'em? Why can't —"

"That's what I want to tell you," she interposed, hurriedly, and as the youth lifted his arms on high in a gesture of ultimate despair, and then threw himself miserably into a chair, she obtained the floor. "The second-hand store doesn't deliver things," she said. "I bought

them at an auction, and it's going out of business, and they have to be taken away before half past four this afternoon. Genesis can't bring them in the wheelbarrow, because, he says, the wheel is broken, and he says he can't possibly carry two tubs and a wash-boiler himself; and he can't make two trips because it's a mile and a half, and I don't like to ask him, anyway; and it would take too long, because he has to get back and finish cutting the grass before your papa gets home this evening. Papa said he *had* to! Now, I don't like to ask you, but it really isn't much. You and Genesis can just slip up there and —"

"Slip!" moaned William. "'Just *slip* up there!' Ye gods!"

"Genesis is waiting on the back porch," she said. "Really it isn't worth your making all this fuss about."

"Oh no!" he returned, with plaintive satire. "It's nothing! Nothing at all!"

"Why, *I* shouldn't mind it," she said briskly, "if I had the time. In fact, I'll have to, if you won't."

"Ye gods!" He clasped his head in his hands, crushed, for he knew that the curse was upon him and he must go. "Ye gods!"

And then, as he stamped to the door, his tragic eye fell upon Jane, and he emitted a final cry of pain:

"Can't you *ever* wash your face?" he shouted.

**Scene structure.** — It is clear that this scene owes its interest partly to its structure; it is a short story in miniature. With almost its first word we are given a hint — more than a hint — of conflict, in Willie's reception of Jane's message. Jane is followed by Mrs. Baxter, but, although Willie shouts, "Never!" his resistance is beaten down by his mother's calm and her explanation, when she gets a chance to give it. If we re-read scenes from a few of the short stories on our list, we shall be able to tell whether all scenes rise with the defiance of a Willie and fall with his defeat; or whether, without this turn in their action, some of them progress undeviatingly from a first hint to an inevitable goal. While we are examining scenes with this in mind, moreover, we shall be deciding the structure of the opening scene in our own short story; and,



as we go over it again and again, we shall be strengthening its line of action, — perhaps omitting some passage of conversation that may mislead a reader as to its direction; perhaps adding some interchange of speeches that will help him to follow.

**Scene development through conversation.** — Mr. Tarkington's scene, however, holds us at least as much by his method of making his structure manifest, as it does by the structure itself. I have yet to meet a reader who is not of the same mind as the old lady in Miss Repplier's essay "Conversation in Novels." "She glanced over a story very rapidly, and if it had too many solid, page-long paragraphs — reflections, descriptions, etc. — she put it sadly but steadfastly aside. If, on the contrary, it was well broken up into conversations, which always impart an air of sprightliness to a book, she said she was sure she would like it, and carried it off in triumph."

**Plot and character through conversation.** — And why should we not like to get our story through conversation? In life we learn more about our friends — their actions and their characters — through listening to their talk than in any other way. So it is in books. From the conversation in *Seventeen*, we learn about the loathsome task that confronts Willie; thus the action of the story is advanced. And from the manner in which Willie and his mother talk we become acquainted with their character. We learn that in Willie there is a quality — perhaps an exaggerated sense of his prominence in the landscape — that makes utterly abhorrent to him the thought of appearing in public with Genesis and the second-hand washtubs. And we learn that Mrs. Baxter has an unruffled calm in the face of violent opposition, which the mother of a Willie may often find useful. The conversation, then, has brought the story forward, and it has allowed the people of the story to show their character as they would in life.

Conversation like this looks simple enough as we read it. It

seems as though all we need do is get pencil and paper and write. Yet as we sit, pencil poised above paper, the writing does not come so quickly as we thought it would. There are so many things to think of all at once! Perhaps it will go better if we take our drama model again and write our conversation, first, as we should if we were constructing a play. If we were to do this with Mr. Tarkington's speeches, they would look like this:

WILLIE. That's a nice thing to ask me to do! Ye gods! Do you think Joe Bullitt's mother would dare to —

MRS. BAXTER. Wait, dearie! I just want to explain —

WILLIE. Explain! Ye gods!

If we find that this enables us to get our first conversation on paper more easily, we may as well continue it throughout our entire first scene.

**Spoken English different from written English.** — Even in this first draft, however, we find enough to consider. Spoken English is very different from even the most informal written English. When we write, we are capable of long paragraphs; yet only when our companions are too breathless to interrupt us — as Willie is when his mother obtains the floor — are we permitted long speeches in conversation. The speeches in our scene, then, if they are to be true to life, must be short. Indeed, Mrs. Baxter does not always get a chance to finish even one sentence! “Wait, dearie! I just want to explain — . . . What I wanted to explain was why it's necessary for you to go with Genesis for the — . . . Genesis isn't old. He —” Of course when our speakers are less excited than Willie, we shall have fewer sentences broken off before they reach their period. But in all conversation, sentences, as well as speeches, are likely to be short, or, if they grow beyond the brevity of the simple sentence, they use the *and* of the compound sentence

rather than the subordinating connectives of the complex sentence. Mrs. Baxter in her explanation of the reason for Willie's degradation uses two *and*'s in one sentence, four in the next.

It is necessary for story tellers to listen with particular attentiveness to the speech of the people about them because in writing they are accustomed to the sentence-forms, the vocabulary, and the inflection of written English; and unless they consciously train themselves to catch and to record the actual speech habits of actual people, their conversation will sound so unnatural that it will rob their whole story of the appearance of life. Mrs. Baxter does not say, "The second-hand store *does not* deliver things. . . . *It is* going out of business. . . . Genesis *cannot* bring them in the wheelbarrow. . . . *I shall* have to, if you *will not*." She uses *doesn't*, *it's*, *can't*, *I'll*, *won't*, the frequent contractions of colloquial English. Willie goes further. He leaves off his final *g* in *awful-lookin'*, and his initial *th* in *'em*. When Jane speaks, all that she has been taught about grammar and pronunciation cannot prevent her from talking like this:

"Well . . . I guess it's good I did, because look — that's the very reason mamma did somep'm so's he can't come any more except in daytime. I guess she thought Willie oughtn't to behave so's't you said so many things about him like that; so to-day she did somep'm, an' now he can't come any more to behave that loving way of Miss Pratt that you said you would be in the lunatic asylum if he didn't quit."

Accordingly the beginner will, if he is wise, devote a section of his notebook to the jotting down of representative scraps of conversation. And even when politeness or the discretion which is the better part of valor demands that his notebook stay in his pocket, he will store in his memory the usage of his circle.



**Dialect.** — This may bring the writers of some stories to the troublesome question of dialect. Punch's advice to the man about to be married, "Don't," although the theme reader is often tempted to give it wholesale to young writers, is not a fair solution of the problem. Perhaps there is no solution — for young writers. They have not the knowledge of linguistics that would enable them to record correctly what they hear. They have not the knowledge of their reading public that would enable them to know just how much trouble it will take to decipher dialect for the sake of the story concealed in it. If, however, their story is about people who speak a dialect, in dialect the conversation of their story must be written. Each must experiment for himself until he arrives at some workable combination of realism and readability. He will probably be able to find, too, some writer of experience who has used much the same field and whose example will be helpful to him.

**Speech individualized.** — The first draft written, the student will re-read it critically. He will ask himself whether it sounds like talk, like the talk of the kind of people whom he is setting forth in his story. And then he will ask further whether he has been able to make the talk of a Willie sound different from the talk of a Mrs. Baxter. He will agree that in Mr. Tarkington's story the one is distinguished from the other so that, even if the speeches were unmarked by the names of mother or son, they would still be attributed by the reader, without difficulty and without possibility of mistake, to the right speaker. Mr. Tarkington, it is true, avails himself of the time-honored device of stamping the speech of Willie with a characteristic phrase, often repeated. "Ye gods!" says Willie. Yet, although this method is frowned upon by severe critics, is it not, unless it is carried to a ridiculous extreme and applied to almost every one in the story, true to life? Can we not all at once recall acquaintances whose speech is punctuated with some such tag as Willie's? And even

without the tag, Willie's words are clearly his and not his mother's.

**The concomitants of speech.** — If what we have written satisfies us now as being natural and sufficiently individual, it is ready for another step toward its appearance in short-story form. Indeed, if we turn again to our drama model, we shall find that even here the pages give us much more than merely the name of the speaker and the words that he says. In any play we may see something like this:

GILBEY [*grinding his teeth*]. This is a nice thing. This is a b—

MRS. GILBEY [*cutting him short*]. Leave it at that, please. Whatever it is, bad language won't make it better.

GILBEY [*bitterly*]. Yes, put me in the wrong as usual. Take your boy's part against me. [*He flings himself into the empty chair opposite her.*<sup>1</sup>]

We scarcely need go over the few lines from Mr. Tarkington's scene, inserting, after *Willie, storming*, and after *Mrs. Baxter, pacifically*; but we must now rewrite our own scene, giving it the tone of voice, the gesture, the action, of life. Our task is, in a way, more difficult than the playwright's. We have not his convenient square brackets. What we interpolate we must somehow weave into the fabric of the story. But, like him, we must give not only the words, but all that accompanies them. As they speak, people smile or scowl. They whisper or they shout. They giggle or they sob. They speak while they are smoking or sewing or eating or walking. All this, as much as the words spoken, belongs to the scene that we are writing. Again a careful examination of what others have written may help us to a use of all the possibilities. As we turn the pages of a collection like *The Best Stories of 1925*,<sup>2</sup> we find:

<sup>1</sup> *Fanny's First Play*, Bernard Shaw. Brentano.

<sup>2</sup> *The Best Stories of 1925*, edited by Edward J. O'Brien. Small, Maynard.

"Here I be," she said, catching hold of his hand to guide him to the table.

"I smell fish this morning," the blind man said cheerfully, as he spread his hands to touch the knife and fork at his place.

"Yes, we got fish." Annie speared one with a fork and took out the backbone. She put milk and sugar in his coffee, cut up a piece of fat pork, and put the plate down in front of him. "There you air!" She helped her own plate and sat down again.<sup>1</sup>

**Setting down conversation.** — Notice that, as we hear the man and woman talk, we see what they are doing. Sometimes the writer works their action into the sentence that gives us their words (using in one sentence the participial phrase *catching hold of his hand to guide him to the table* and in another a clause introduced by *as*); and sometimes she takes a separate sentence or even more, as she does in the last paragraph of the selection just given. In another story we have

"Hand over your gun!" Pringle demanded.

The youth straightened himself with a flicker of confidence. "I ain't got none!" he threw back.

Pringle searched him: he had told the truth. "Come then, give me a hand here!" he commanded, laying his own weapon on the table.<sup>2</sup>

Again the writer is careful to make us see what the people in the story are doing as they talk. This writer's habit is to give us the action first and the words after it, rather than, like the other writer, to follow the words with the action.

Sometimes the action not only accompanies the words but expresses the mood of the words:

Amelia marched across from the sink, her round shoulders raised, shaking her dish-towel angrily. . . .<sup>3</sup>

"Now, Maw —" but the sound of the kitchen door slamming to

<sup>1</sup> "The Gift," Sandra Alexander. *The Reviewer*.

<sup>2</sup> "The Hands of the Enemy," Charles Caldwell Dobie. *Harper's Monthly*.

<sup>3</sup> "Fire and Water," Glenway Wescott. *Collier's*.



behind Mrs. Pettishall drowned Widden's vain attempts to make peace.<sup>1</sup>

Judge Rodenbaugh lowered his head, stared at the carpet with an angry frown. Then he rose, thrust his hands into his pockets, his face turned away, his chin sunk in a heavy fold between the square points of his collar. "I don't propose, Judge," he began . . .<sup>2</sup>

Often the writer feels that the flow of conversation is too swift to be held up by long interpolations, and he compresses the mood into a word — half-heartedly, humbly, harshly, mildly, triumphantly. It must be remembered that these words are, in a way, labels like those we rejected in our earlier writing about people. They should be used very sparingly; the words and the actions of the speakers should themselves carry their mood to the reader without the expository intervention of the author. A page spotted with a rash of *-ly*'s is, moreover, sure to have on its reader the effect so feelingly expressed in the following letter, which I have kept for a long time without, I am ashamed to say, preserving the name of the newspaper from which I clipped it:

SIR: In that \$10,000 prize novel of Leona Dalrymple's — *Diana of the Green Van* — these appear in the dialogue of the first fifty pages:

<i>exclaimed readily</i>	<i>said pityingly</i>	<i>finished carelessly</i>
<i>said maliciously</i>	<i>said gently</i>	<i>sniffed tragically</i>
<i>said disapprovingly</i>	<i>rapped lightly</i>	<i>sang happily</i>
<i>said discouragingly</i>	<i>begged happily</i>	<i>said pleasantly</i>
<i>said politely</i>	<i>smiled readily</i>	<i>shrugged carelessly</i>
<i>resumed offensively</i>	<i>said maliciously</i>	<i>sniffed tragically</i>
<i>snapped sourly</i>	<i>offered cordially</i>	<i>asked vaguely</i>
<i>demanded irritably</i>	<i>said lamely</i>	<i>exclaimed rapturously</i>
<i>exclaimed devoutly</i>	<i>hinted coolly</i>	<i>said politely</i>
<i>said steadily</i>	<i>said curtly</i>	<i>added fairly</i>
<i>said impudently</i>	<i>said civilly</i>	<i>said suavely</i>

<sup>1</sup> "Old Man Ledge," May Stanley. *Pictorial Review*.

<sup>2</sup> "Coward's Castle," Walter Gilkyson. *Atlantic Monthly*.

<i>exclaimed restlessly</i>	<i>reminded curiously</i>	<i>said dryly</i>
<i>commented critically</i>	<i>said honestly</i>	<i>exclaimed quietly</i>
<i>countered lightly</i>	<i>puffed helplessly</i>	<i>said formally</i>
<i>said calmly</i>	<i>breathed incredulously</i>	<i>added guilelessly</i>
<i>flashed pointedly</i>	<i>wheedled gently</i>	<i>said smoothly</i>
<i>stammered lamely</i>	<i>gurgled presently</i>	<i>said gratefully</i>
<i>purred correctively</i>	<i>said flatly</i>	<i>sympathized smoothly</i>
<i>exclaimed viciously</i>	<i>laughed radiantly</i>	<i>began slowly</i>
<i>said whimsically</i>	<i>said pityingly</i>	
<i>admitted ruefully</i>	<i>demanded elaborately</i>	

There are 441 pages, but I could read no farther. I was overcome horribly, exhausted completely and quit absolutely. Was it not Coleridge who said: "The want of adverbs in the Iliad is very characteristic"?

Yours distressfully,

W. H. E.

Thus far we have said nothing about the verb *to say*, on which, together with its many substitutes, we must depend to indicate who is speaking. It is possible, of course, to set down a rapid exchange of remarks without tacking to each of them the name of the speaker:

A second, staring there into space, Mrs. Kaufman sat with her arm still entwining the slender but lax form. "Ruby, is — is it something you ain't telling mamma?"

"Oh, mommy, mommy!"

"Is there?"

"I — I don't know."

"Ruby, should you be afraid to talk to mamma, who don't want nothing but her child's happiness?"

"You know, mommy. You know!"

"Know what, baby?"

"I — er —"

"Is there somebody else you got on your mind, baby?"

"You know, mommy."

"Tell mamma, baby. It ain't a — a crime if you got maybe somebody else on your mind."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Ice Water, Pl——!" in *Gaslight Sonatas*, Fannie Hurst. Harper.

Beginners, however, must be certain that the reader can tell at once who says each line. If the reader has to work his way, speech by speech, back to some clue to the speakers and then down the page again, marking this speech for A, that for B, the effect on his enjoyment of the story is not a happy one.

Usually *he said* or some substitute for *he said* must be used. Again the student may study the practice of experienced writers to see what kinds of substitutes are possible. The best, he will find, is the sort of word that contributes something besides mere glue to the sentence, something of the sound of the voice, like *whispered, sighed, muttered, mumbled, grumbled, growled, called, shouted, screamed, sighed*. Next in value are words that, without reproducing sound, have some definiteness of meaning and are still more than plus signs, — *commented, acquiesced, confessed, advised, repeated, asked, inquired, queried, demanded, replied, responded, retorted, contended, exclaimed, continued, persisted*. An unbroken succession of colorless *he said*'s, however, is scarcely worse than an avoidance of them so ingenious that it distracts the reader from the conversation itself. Against this practice, Mr. Franklin P. Adams<sup>1</sup> protests in

### MONOTONOUS VARIETY

*(all of them from two stories in a single magazine)*

She 'greeted' and he 'volunteered';  
 She 'giggled'; he 'asserted';  
 She 'queried' and he 'lightly veered';  
 She 'drawled' and he 'averted';  
 She 'scoffed,' she 'laughed' and he 'averred';  
 He 'mumbled,' 'parried,' and 'demurred.'

She 'languidly responded'; he  
 'Incautiously assented';

<sup>1</sup> *Tobogganing on Parnassus*, Franklin P. Adams. Doubleday, Page.



Doretta 'proffered lazily';  
 Will 'speedily invented';  
 She 'parried,' 'whispered,' 'bade,' and 'mused';  
 He 'urged,' 'acknowledged,' and 'refused.'

She 'softly added'; she 'alleged';  
 He 'consciously invited';  
 She 'then corrected'; William 'hedged';  
 She 'prettily recited';  
 She 'nodded,' 'stormed,' and 'acquiesced';  
 He 'promised,' 'hastened,' and 'confessed.'

Doretta 'chided'; 'cautioned' Will;  
 She 'voiced' and he 'defended';  
 She 'vouchsafed'; he 'continued still';  
 She 'sneered' and he 'amended';  
 She 'smiled,' she 'twitted,' and she 'dared';  
 He 'scorned,' 'exclaimed,' 'pronounced,' and 'flared.'

He 'waived,' 'believed,' 'explained,' and 'tried';  
 'Commented' she; he 'muttered';  
 She 'blushed,' she 'dimpled,' and she 'sighed';  
 He 'ventured' and he 'stuttered';  
 She 'spoke,' 'suggested,' and 'pursued';  
 He 'pleaded,' 'pouted,' 'called,' and 'viewed.'

O synonymble writers, ye  
 Whose work is so high-pricey,  
 Think ye not that variety  
 May haply be too spicy?  
 Meseems that in an elder day  
 They had a thing or two to *say*.

**Paragraphing and punctuation of conversation.** — Is it necessary to say anything about the paragraphing and punctuation of conversation? My experience occasionally brings me in contact with young people who have reached what is probably their thirteenth year of schooling without recognizing that a

passage of conversation is broken into paragraphs as speaker follows speaker, each speech being set in a paragraph by itself, even if it consists of only one word or a fragment of one word. And although the teaching of the punctuation of quotation comes in many public schools somewhere in the vicinity of the fourth year of the elementary course of study, it may be brought freshly to the mind of people very much beyond the fourth grade. If you wish your words as author to introduce the words of your character, what you write will be punctuated as follows:

Then he said haltingly, "I am very grateful to you, Netta."<sup>1</sup>

If your words are to follow the speech, you have:

"I'll telephone up," stammered the clerk.

If the speech is to be broken by the interpolation, it may be punctuated thus:

"My mother doesn't understand anything about my position," he said harshly. "There's nothing you can do for me. Sorry you had the trip. And now you had better get out as soon as possible. How did they happen to let you up here?"

Or, if your interpolation is itself a complete sentence, you use the dash before and after it; and if, in addition, it interrupts a sentence of the speech, you continue the interrupted sentence with a small letter as in the following:

"Oh, how glad I am, Mrs. Hunting. Why" — the girl spoke softly — "it is almost worth while it should have happened if it brings you together again."

If the speeches, by the way, are not very short, the reader prefers the author's words either preceding the speeches or breaking them not many words after their opening. He wants to know at once who is talking.

<sup>1</sup> These illustrations are taken from "An Army with Banners," Katharine Fullerton Gerould, *Harper's Monthly*, reprinted in *The Best Short Stories of 1925*.

Notice, too, that a correct paragraphing of what some critics, following the analogy of the drama, call "stage business" will eliminate the necessity for using the *he said*'s or their equivalent:

His face crimsoned. "You know as well as anything that I can't run an apartment and the house both."

"We'll talk tomorrow. I'm awfully tired now. Good-night." He slipped into his bed, leaving her to put out the lamp and raise the windows.

The pale girl flushed. "Oh, no, Mrs. Hunting. There wasn't a thing — ever!" She gave a little involuntary shiver.

**Description in the scene.** — Even now, after having rewritten our scene so as to add to speech its accessories of expression, tone, gesture, and action, we have still not done for it all that the playwright does for his. In any play we find passages like this:

It is noon. In the Underwoods' dining-room a bright fire is burning. On one side of the fireplace are double doors leading to the drawing-room, on the other side a door leading to the hall. In the centre of the room a long dining-table without a cloth is set out as a Board table. At the head of it, in the Chairman's seat, sits John Anthony, an old man, big, clean-shaven, and high-coloured, with thick white hair, and thick dark eyebrows. His movements are rather slow and feeble, but his eyes are very much alive. There is a glass of water by his side. On his right sits his son Edgar, an earnest-looking man of thirty, reading a newspaper. Next him Wanklin, a man with jutting eyebrows, and silver-streaked light hair, is bending over transfer papers. Tench, the Secretary, a short and rather humble, nervous man, with side whiskers, stands helping him. On Wanklin's right sits Underwood, the Manager, a quiet man, with a long, stiff jaw, and steady eyes. Back to the fire is Scantlebury, a very large, pale, sleepy man, with grey hair, rather bald. Between him and the Chairman are two empty chairs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Silver Box*, John Galsworthy. Scribner.



Here again the playwright's method is easier than ours. He may put all his description, of place and persons, in one passage and add to it only to describe additional people as they make their appearance on the scene. If our task as short-story writers is harder, however, it results in pleasanter reading. We also must enable the reader to make pictures of place and people, but we are not permitted to mass our description in a solid block at the beginning of our scene and have done with it. When our readers have finished our story, they will have a complete picture of John Anthony; but they will have built it up as they read, learning about his movements, slow and feeble, as he makes them, and of his eyes, very much alive, as he uses them. In a word, we apply here the methods that we were at pains to learn when we were writing our descriptions of people. As our characters act and talk, we describe them acting and talking; but, in the short story, as it *is* short, the limitation of space discourages long passages of description at any one point; and we are inclined to distribute our description, a bit here and a bit there, often running it through the conversation in our interpolations. For, although for convenience' sake, we are talking of conversation and description separately, we must remember that the story is a whole, all its parts fusing into *story*, and nothing else. Henry James in his paper "The Art of Fiction," to which we have already referred several times, gives us this emphatic reminder:

People often talk of these things [*description and dialogue, incident and description*] as if they had a kind of internecine distinctness, instead of melting into each other at every breath, and being intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression. I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive . . . of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident. . . . A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like

any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts.

From this point of view let us again go over our scene, this time to make sure that it gives, not only speech and action, but also pictures of setting and characters, all as "intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression," "a living thing, all one and continuous."

Then we shall be almost ready to cast aside the last of these preliminaries. They have progressed from our first draft of our scene as the spoken word only, through our re-working of it to include tone of voice, expression, and action, to this latest re-writing, which has made visible the environment in which it moves and the characters who speak and act in it. We say not *ready* but *almost ready* because our scene is not an entity, existing by and for itself, but an integral part of a larger whole, the complete story, to which it must accommodate itself and whose purposes it must serve.

## CHAPTER XVII

### SPECIAL PARTS OF THE STORY

**The opening scene.** — If we wish our story to begin at once with a scene, and if we have succeeded in making our scene solid, full-bodied, existing in three dimensions, evident to the eyes and the ears as well as to the intelligence of our readers — if we have written a scene like this, it may stand as it is at the opening of our story. For if it is all this, it will have given our readers all that they need to know to go on with the story with interest and understanding. They will need to be aware of the milieu, the geographical and social background of the story, the air it breathes. They will need to have a sense of the tone, the mood of the story, sober or gay, which it aims to have its readers share. They will need to meet the characters of the story, the important ones at least. They will need to know about the situation from which the story springs. All this information our scene will have conveyed to them in that manner which is the method of life and of fiction. That is, they will have gathered it all from the scene, without having it expounded to them as though they were without the intelligence to read and understand a story without the author's gloss.

**Other openings.** — We may feel, however, that our opening should stress something other than speech and action. Perhaps ours is a story which depends above all on the environment shaping the characters. Perhaps a triangle of park at the end of a street, or a view of roofs and chimneys, or a clump of trees, or a mountain shutting out the sky is the most important factor in our story. This, we believe, cannot be adequately expressed



in any interchange of speech between one human being and another; it demands that our story begin with a description of it. Perhaps we are convinced that our story arises from a situation so involved and having so long a history that the only way to set it forth clearly is to recount it at once in a narrative which compresses the events of years into a page or two. Perhaps we even cling to the opinion, in spite of all discouragement, that our story embodies some vision of ours of the magnificence or the futility, the wild injustice or the inevitable equity of human affairs, which must be stated in an introductory essay, long or short. If we feel that our artistic salvation hangs upon our writing some opening other than the scene upon which we have been working, of course we must write that opening; but before we do so, let us measure our response to it as readers. Let us read a dozen stories with special attention to their openings, asking ourselves how many begin with a presented scene, how many with description, how many with recounted action, how many with exposition; discussing together with other members of our class the appropriateness of each kind of opening to its story and its hold on the readers' interest. Then we may want to write a last revision of the beginning of our own story in the light of what we have read.

**The angle of vision.** — Our story is now begun — well begun, we hope; yet, although a good beginning is much, we may call it, not half, but perhaps a third done. As we go on to the writing of the rest of our story, we realize that the opening has given us an impetus which carries us fast and far indeed, but which must carry us only in the direction set by the opening, and not in any other. The opening has, as we noted before, committed us to the key which is to dominate; it has encouraged certain expectations in regard to the characters which their words and actions throughout may not wantonly violate. In still another way does it bind us. Probably, without giving any

thought to the matter, we have written our opening in the third person. Early in our descriptive writing we discarded the *I* of the first person as awkward and amateurish, and we are not likely now to go back to it and to abandon the third person to which we have accustomed ourselves. There are, it is true, writers who affect the *I* method, either writers who use the *I* to make plausible an improbable tale or writers of subtle stories — like those of Henry James, Edith Wharton, Katharine Fullerton Gerould — involving a great deal of psychological analysis, to which they evidently believe they can give narrative semblance if they allow themselves the right to comment by assuming to be themselves inside the story.

For these writers, however, as well as for those of us who prefer the third person and accept its limitations, the same question arises. Who is this person, first or third, through whose eyes and ears our story is being seen and heard and whose intelligence is recording it? Dare we as authors ascribe to ourselves an omniscience that pierces to the heart of every character, that sees not only the overt action of every one but also the hidden motives that prompt it; that hears not only the spoken word of every one but also the unspoken thought? To arrogate to oneself this power is not now the fashion in fiction. To-day the writer chooses one angle of vision and holds to it consistently throughout his story. He takes some one character as recording instrument and reports everything — incident, character, environment — as it appears to this character. For this purpose, of course, he will not snatch at any character, hit or miss, but he will deliberately select the one whose reaction most effectively brings out what is in the story. He may decide upon one of the principal characters; he may pick out a subordinate character. He may live within the mind of this character and experience the story through his personality, or he may prefer merely to look over his shoulder.

Just at present, the first of these two possibilities is very popular. Scarcely a month passes that the magazines do not offer it to us in their short stories. The method can be seen from the few opening paragraphs of Helen Dore Boylston's "Dawn" in the *Atlantic Monthly*, July, 1926:

Barbara felt she could not be blamed for detesting Frank Wallace even before she saw him. The Wallace twins lived next door, and these stupid fourteen-year-old boys talked of nothing else but Frank from morning to night. He hated girls; he could shin up a flagpole, using only one hand; he could lick a fellow twice as big as he was; he was a "peachy" rider; he was coming to stay a whole week, maybe longer. Barbara told her mother she simply wanted to scream every time she saw the twins coming. But she never did more than say, "Huh — your old Frank!" and walk away haughtily.

It couldn't be that she was jealous. She was sure she was not of a jealous nature. When the twins boasted that their cousin Frank could ride better than any old girl, she didn't even laugh, though the idea was utterly absurd. Why, she had been riding since she was a child, and in only seven months she would be sixteen years old. Besides, it was ridiculous to say that a boy could do anything better than she could.

He was coming on Monday, and his coming made no difference whatever in Barbara's life. She didn't even see him. She was very busy with her own affairs.

Tuesday afternoon she glued up a crack in the handle of her riding crop, and when it was done she went into the living-room. Mother was sitting by the window, sewing, and Barbara stopped to look at her, because the sun was shining on her red hair. No other girl in the world, Barbara thought, had a mother quite so beautiful as hers. Just to look at her sitting there, with her hair shining, and that look that wasn't quite a smile on her face, and the white stuff in her lap, made one have a feeling — a warm, happy feeling, yet queer, too.

Mother looked up and saw the riding crop. She said at once, "Oh, Barbara, surely you aren't going to ride this hot afternoon? You'll make yourself sick, dear."

Barbara hadn't thought of riding until that minute, but of course she said in a disappointed voice, "Well, Mother, if you're going to



be upset about it — it isn't hot down by the river, honestly it isn't; it's shady there. Don't you think I'm old enough to be trusted to take care of myself?"

Mother sighed a little, breaking off her thread and knotting it again. "I wish you weren't such a tomboy, Barbara," she said. Barbara knew that meant she might go, so now she felt that she must. She didn't bother to change into riding breeches. She hadn't really wanted to ride, and everyone was too busy keeping cool to notice what she had on.<sup>1</sup>

The same method is used in "Commencement" by Sara Haardt in the *American Mercury*, August, 1926. This story opens:

From where she was sitting on the left of the stage, Maryellen could see the whole family: Papa, in his new blue suit, his forehead shining pinkly; Mamma and Aunt Mamie in a whispered confab behind Aunt Mamie's turkey-tail fan; Billie, on the other side of Papa, wigwagging his programme at Dick Foster across the aisle, his head as sleek as a young seal's. Mamma looked sweet in her changeable silk, the hairs that straggled down from her knot softly crimped about her face. Aunt Mamie had seen to all the little details that put the finishing touches to their costumes. She might not have the means to do things, she always said, but she knew how they *ought* to be done; and so, as she had nothing but time on her hands, she could fuss around until she accomplished the little things. Maryellen was named for her — and Mamma — and it was natural she should take a special interest in her. Poor Aunt Mamie! She had her rhinestone pins in her hair and a tell-tale bloom on her cheeks tonight.

Mamma was nodding proudly, and Maryellen knew that Aunt Mamie had just said her dress was the prettiest of any of the six graduates. The other dresses, of course, were much more elaborate, the finest that could be bought in Meridian's ready-to-wear stores, but they had what Aunt Mamie called "a set air": Maryellen looked as if she had been melted and poured into hers. Taffeta was *always* good, and Mamma had paid three dollars a yard for the soft, lustrous quality that formed the foundation. Over the full skirt Aunt Mamie had draped the remnants of real rose-point lace, saved over from

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from the *Atlantic Monthly*, July, 1926, by special permission, the Atlantic Monthly Company.

Mamma's wedding veil. With a little conniving there had been enough for the sleeves and the fichu. . . .

It is a particularly safe method for beginners because, once embarked upon it, it is a more difficult matter to leave it than to continue consistently with it.

Many writers, however, do not wish to be imprisoned within the shell of any one personality; they prefer looking over the character's shoulder to living inside his mind. This brings us back to the purely objective angle of drama, from which most of the opening scenes of our group are probably written. This discussion will have made us aware that our opening committed us to an angle of vision and that we may not depart from it without confusing our readers. Even a transition of a sort, thrown out as a bridge, will not save us. Readers will no longer tolerate, "And now let us take our leave of Amy and see what has been happening to Alfred." No, if we began with Amy, with Amy we must continue to the end.

**Movement.** — And so we continue to tell our story, using as guide the course we mapped out for it in our preliminary statements, yet not hesitating to alter that course if our ripper knowledge of our characters suggests another as truer. As we leave the opening behind us, our pace becomes brisker. Especially when we reach a scene like the climax, we find conversation and action pushing forward, shaking off much of their accompaniment of descriptive detail. This increase in speed of movement runs parallel with an increase in intensity. The pull of the forces in the struggle becomes stronger; passions rise. As authors we do nothing to clog the movement. We let it drive forward.

**Accident and coincidence.** — When we arrive at the turning-point, we are careful to make it significant, but we refuse to let our anxiety to emphasize the direction of the action mislead us into reënforcing it by importing into the story anything alien

to it. This is the point at which some writers, conscious that the falling action which they have planned now seems feeble, try to bolster it up by dragging in accident and coincidence. To awaken the dormant love in the heart of a selfish mother, they make the unwanted child fall desperately ill — or fall from the nursery window. To bring the crabbed old misanthrope in contact with the Christmas spirit, they fling him down a flight of stairs and bowl him into a ragged youngster at the bottom. Their judge or their governor, adamant to pleas for mercy, discovers that the prisoner who is suing for clemency is his own wayward, long-lost son.

Once our story has passed its peak and is on the downward slope, we may have to check its tendency toward a too precipitous dive to the ending. The reader does not, of course, wish us to delay the outcome unduly; but neither does he wish to be jolted along so breathlessly that he has reason to suspect our own interest in our story has evaporated and our eye is set longingly on the last word.

**The ending.** — The ending itself brings us much the same problems of technique as the opening. Shall we bring our story to a close with the scene that presents the catastrophe, just as we may have opened it with the scene that gave the first hint of the struggle? Or shall we add to this a descriptive passage, as we may have prefaced the initial incident with description, leaving with the reader a picture that will remain with him as an adequate, a memorable ending of the story — Father and Mother Penn on the doorstep of the barn with the peaceful evening landscape spread before them; the farmer and his wife riding home happily from the market town, the glare of the sun softened to a sunset light, the heavy baby asleep on the bottom of the wagon; a little boy swinging his heels on a gate-post, treasuring in the pocket of his blue jacket a white envelope with a red stamp? Even if we began, however, with an account of events



preceding the story, it is to be hoped that we shall be able to deny ourselves any satisfaction that may come from ending by tidily disposing of the future of the characters. Above all, if we opened, in spite of all that could be done and said, with an expository overture, and our sense of symmetry demands that we now close with similar comment, may it be in matter not too obvious and in tone neither too moralistic nor too world-weary and cynical. Before we actually finish our story, it may be well to make a study of the endings of some dozen stories that we have liked, weighing the relative merits of different methods of closing, and arriving at a standard of interest and effectiveness that shall govern our own writing.

Indeed, throughout our writing, we have been reading short stories, and what little has been given by way of precept has been set down only that we may know what questions to ask of the short-story writers to whom we have been going for our real guidance.

In a course like this, not in any way a special course in the short story but a more general course in description and narration, it is possible that students may not have the time to write a complete short story. In that case, they may write the opening scene, the climax, and the catastrophe, with possibly the turning-point, omitting the stretches of action, long or short, which would connect these in the finished story. The entire story, of course, they work out in their minds, or they would not be able to set parts of it on paper.

**The title.** — There remains only the title. Possibly an appropriate title has already been suggested by this or that in the story. It may be that the principal character so stands out that the story must bear this name and no other. The table of contents of the *O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1924* reveals such a title, "Margaret Blake," and others in which the principal character figures, either figuratively as in "Rachel

and Her Children" and "Uriah's Son," or in combination with a statement of the theme of the story as in "Professor Boynton Rereads History." The theme of the story or some comment upon it may stand alone as title as in "The Spring Flight," "The Most Dangerous Game," "The Secret at the Crossroads," "The Tie That Binds," "What Do You Mean — Americans?" "One Uses the Handkerchief," "Progress." There may be a suggestion of place as in "The Secret at the Crossroads." An article of importance in the story may give it its title, as "The Amethyst Comb" or "The Menorah."

Do we, as readers, find all these titles equally successful in winning our interest and inducing us to turn to the stories and read them? Do we fancy a title like "Progress," or does it sound too much like the heading of an article? Do we enjoy a sentence title like "What Do You Mean — Americans?" or "One Uses the Handkerchief"? Does a figurative title like "The Spring Flight" appeal to our imagination? Do the allusions in such titles as "Rachel and Her Children" and "Uriah's Son" throw a light upon the story for us? We may scrutinize lists of story titles and study their effect on us and their bearing on the stories before we decide upon a title for our story.

In all our work with the short story we have said nothing about ingenuity of plot and surprise endings. We have regarded the short story, not as a toy or a trick, but as a piece of literature, to be taken as seriously as any other work of art, novel or drama, and to be judged by its fidelity to life as its writer sees life and by its practice of the special art form which its writer has chosen.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A VACATION FROM REALISM

Thus far we have held fast to the realities of life. What our eyes have not seen, our pencils have not put upon paper. Yet life is not wholly a matter of getting up in the morning, doing the day's work, and going to bed at night. There are dreams. The world that we see about us may seem at times a most unsatisfactory place. Well, it is possible to escape from it to a world where everything happens as we desire it to happen. In this world, the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong; men are brave and women are beautiful. The wind blows from the fields of romance.

**Historical romance.** — Where shall we go questing for this world? Some have sought it in the past. They have written of D'Artagnan, of *Ivanhoe* and Richard Cœur de Lion and Saladin, of Colonel Esmond. This world of the past has, however, a wealth of ascertainable detail that holds off the writer whose hours are filled with scheduled tasks and who cannot quite abandon the world he lives in with all its time-consuming duties and make himself citizen, say, of the London of Queen Anne's time, as Thackeray did, ruffling in its coffee-houses and taverns, rapping out its oaths, eating its venison pasties and its partridges. As much research goes to the atmosphere of a thrilling historical romance as into the writing of a thesis in history. Maurice Hewlett was a scholar as well as a romancer; Jeffrey Farnol, though he may be guilty of an occasional inaccuracy, knows more concrete details about the life of the early England of the Edwards and the later England of the Prince Regent



than a college student is likely to accumulate in his courses in the scientific study of history.

**Tales of the occult.** — Some writers seek escape from the too too solid things of a daylight world in the moonlight of the supernatural or the twilight borderland of illusion and hallucination. Many inexperienced writers turn in this direction, so eager to be of the fellowship of Edgar Allan Poe and his successors that they ignore the fact that this unsubstantial world also has a very exacting realism of its own. Without any knowledge of abnormal psychology, they attempt to create the fantastic visions of a disordered imagination. Fascinated by tales of the mysterious, they do not realize that these tales have the power to fascinate by reason of their author's knowledge of details, scientifically realistic within their eery limits. Arthur Machen, for one, is an adept in demonology and other cabalistic lore. Yet this ghostly — often ghastly — romance has an irresistible attraction for many a youthful writer concerning whom one certainly need not cry:

Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

**Fairy and folk stories.** — In the world of fancy are there, then, no marvels that the young writer may bring home to us with the insistence of successful art? There is a realm of white magic, the homeland of fairies, elves, pixies, brownies, leprechauns, kobolds, and the like. Its historians have been Charles Perrault, the brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen. Andrew Lang and Joseph Jacobs have been scholars of its annals. If these savants and men of letters were not ashamed to be young enough in spirit to treasure the fairy tale, surely

we cannot lightly call it childish. And, although for generations there has been ransacking of every nook and corner, material still remains for those who will look for it. Of course, what these writers have done, or what Selma Lagerlöf has done with the folk lore of Sweden, is, in more ways than one, beyond the reach of the undergraduate student.

**Source of material.** — But here and there in the memory of most are trifles unconsidered until now. If they have not found their way into print, perhaps we may put them there. Perhaps, as children, we have heard again and again, from mother or grandmother or nurse, Irish stories such as Seumas MacManus and Ruth Sawyer have written down in books; perhaps the tales were not Irish, but Bohemian or Serbian or Russian. Perhaps we have known some such story teller as Uncle Remus or listened in some lumber-jacks' camp to yarns about Paul Bunyan. Perhaps our reading has led us down unfrequented by-paths, and we are acquainted with ancient legends from Talmud and Midrash or from the literature of the Church Fathers. Or if chance has not led us to treasure-trove such as any of these, we may retell fairy tales that are not so recondite, as Howard and Katharine Pyle have done, rendering the old stories in a new way. Or we may steep our minds in the wonders of this other world until our imagination refashions them in marvels of its own, like Lord Dunsany's strange tales or the more homely stories, lightened with human laughter, of James Stephens.

**Sense of the familiar.** — We find that most of these stories are amphibious: they partake of the nature of both worlds — the world of dream and the world of reality. Perhaps the same story teller's instinct that made Defoe particularize the scoured striped silk gown worn by the apparition of Mrs. Veal also makes Red Ridinghood have a pat of familiar, everyday butter in her basket when she meets the wolf. In these tales the familiar

mingles with the marvelous. Children are here, and the human relationships of father and son, brother and sister, bridegroom and bride. Parents long for a child; youth seeks a mate. Fairy-tale people sleep under the accustomed shelter of a roof, whether of king's palace or of goatherd's hovel. Fairy-tale people wear clothes, the rags of Cinderella slaving in the ashes of the hearth or the beautiful gowns of Cinderella dancing in the palace. Fairy-tale people eat the peasant's black bread or the prince's sugar-bread.

**Sense of the marvelous.** — But this familiar world is transfigured into a world of magic and wonder. The child strays from human habitation to the home of the bears or the dwarfs or the witch. Instead of the straw roof of the woodcutter's hut, she sees the gingerbread roof and the candy window-panes of the witch's dwelling. It is a world of mystic commands that must not be transgressed, of incantations and transformations. Magic sleep falls upon princess and page-boy. Talismans open gates of brass. Wishes come true.

**Poetic justice.** — It is a world of poetic justice, of readjustment of the galling inequalities of life. The poor brother triumphs; the rich is foiled. The youngest son, neglected and despised, answers the riddles, accomplishes the task, and wins the princess; the folly of the fool proves better than the wisdom of the wise; the ill-treated drudge weds the prince. Virtue is rewarded; the industrious daughter is showered with gold; the girl of pleasant speech drops pearls and diamonds from her kindly lips.

**Symmetry of structure.** — If we are to bring to our readers tales that shall open magic casements, we must fashion them with care. We can make no greater mistake than to think that these tales are easy to write. No matter how rich they may be in detail, they must have an absolute singleness of effect. Often this is achieved by a rigid symmetry of structure. Little Half



Chick sets out to go to Madrid and to meet his fate. On his way to Madrid and up the ladder of his destiny he callously hoppity-skips away from three things in distress, — the water choked with weeds, the fire dying for want of air, the breeze caught in the branches of a tree. He reaches the king's palace and the summit of his destiny. In his fall from high estate, he is thrice rebuffed by the things that he has spurned — the water that rises in the pot until it covers him, the fire that burns hot and hotter until it scorches him to a crisp, the wind that whirls him through the air and sticks him on the point of the steeple, there to stay forever to tell which way the wind blows. It has the closing in of inevitable fate of a Greek tragedy. And this is the pattern on which many of the tales are built.

**Parallelism.** — If the structure has not this perfect symmetry of the whole, it usually has a lesser symmetry of parts. Episode is followed by similar parallel episode. The little Gingerbread Man runs away from a little old woman and a little old man; he runs away from a horse; he runs away from a cow; he runs away from a barn full of threshers; he runs away from a field full of mowers. Epaminondas brings butter home from his Auntie, which he puts in his hat and which melts and runs all over him; and so his Mammy tells him he should have cooled it in the brook all the way home. He brings a little puppy-dog home from his Auntie, which he cools in the brook all the way home and which is dead when he takes it to his Mammy; and so she tells him he should have tied it on the end of a string and led it along the road all the way home. He brings a loaf of bread home from his Auntie, which he ties on the end of a string and pulls along the road all the way home and which is good for nothing when his Mammy sees it.

**Repetition.** — This symmetry of structure is emphasized by repetition. Each time Epaminondas confronts his Mammy, she cries, "Epaminondas, Epaminondas, you ain't got the

sense you was born with"; and when his folly exasperates her beyond endurance, she adds, "You never did have the sense you was born with; you never will have the sense you was born with." Little Half Chick answers each of his petitioners with the same identical words: "The idea! I can't be bothered with you! I'm off to Madrid to see the king." The little Gingerbread Man taunts each of his pursuers with a jingle that grows with each triumph, until at last it becomes:

I have run away from a little old woman,  
A little old man,  
A cow,  
A horse,  
A barn full of threshers,  
A field full of mowers,  
And I can run away from you, I can!  
Run! Run! as fast as you can!  
You can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man! <sup>1</sup>

And each time the story teller follows the jingle with the words, "And they couldn't catch him."

So in stories written in these latter days in the manner of the old tales, we retain this symmetry and this repetition. In *The Happy Prince* by Oscar Wilde, the little Swallow stays with the Prince one night to carry the ruby from the Prince's sword-hilt to the poor mother of the fever-stricken boy; he stays a second night to pluck out one of the Prince's sapphire eyes and to take it to the student starving in his garret; he stays a third night to slip the other sapphire eye into the hand of the little match-girl. Each night the Prince says, "Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, will you not stay with me one night longer?"

**Concreteness.** — Oscar Wilde, although he has, of course, a tendency to elaborate over-much, has the older story-tellers'

<sup>1</sup> *Stories to Tell to Children*, Sara Cone Bryant. Houghton Mifflin.

delight in the beauty of things. He has especially their feeling for color. His Happy Prince is "gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold." The Charity Children come out of the cathedral in "bright scarlet cloaks" and "clean white pinafores." The Swallow tells the Prince of a King in Egypt in a painted coffin, "wrapped in yellow linen," with a "chain of pale green jade" round his throat; of "yellow lions" with "eyes like green beryls"; of a ruby "redder than a red rose" and of sapphires "as blue as the great sea"; of "red ibises"; of "the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony"; of "the great green snake that sleeps in a palm-tree." When the snow and the frost come, Wilde paints this picture: "The streets looked as if they were made of silver, they were so bright and glistening; long icicles like crystal daggers hung down from the eaves of the houses; everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice."<sup>1</sup>

Not only color, but also sound, smell, and taste our story must have. Picture after picture it must make with its words. Its names of prince and goose-girl must have a music to conjure up atmosphere. Its rhythm must flow like water with the frequent *and* of childlike story-telling.

**Preliminary reports and exercises.** — Before we write a fantastic tale of our own, we should do what we can to stimulate our imagination and to induce in ourselves a mood in which we may capture the charm of this kind of story. Members of a class may each select and report on a story teller or a type of story, such as stories about the animals of the meadow or the jungle, *how* and *why* stories like the *Just So Stories* of Rudyard Kipling, oriental tales like the *Arabian Nights*, English tales, Irish, Scandinavian, and so on. Or, better, different groups may work on the story themes common to the fairy tale, such as the

<sup>1</sup> *The Happy Prince, and Other Fairy Tales*, Oscar Wilde. G. P. Putnam's Sons.



quest, the talisman, transformation, parted lovers reunited, and so on; on the characters of the fairy tale world; on symmetry and parallelism; on the use of repetition; on the forms that the refrain may take; on the wealth of sense impressions in the fairy tale; on rhythm of sentence and music of word in the fairy tale. Then we shall be ready to write our own fairy story; but before we go far with it, we may like to bring to class for constructive criticism, first, a summary of our plot and then our opening scene.

Notice in the following story the student's attempt to give the marvelous the homeliness of the familiar; to construct a plot with a series of similar episodes, their likeness accentuated by repetition; to set the story in a solid world of concrete detail; to make the story move to the music of fitting word and rhythm.

### IVAN THE LUCKLESS <sup>1</sup>

*By Pauline Horwitt*

When we were little children, we would cuddle about our mother on a winter's evening, while the wind heaped up the soft white snow against the window, and the logs hissed and roared in the big brick oven of our Russian home, and the wind went moaning in the chimney; and we would call clamorously, "A story, Mother, a story." Rare old stories Mother used to tell us, about witches, and hobgoblins, and wolves, and bears, until we would fear to look at the window lest we should see two fiery eyes gleaming from the dark, phantom-like trees. Yet of all those stories, this one alone has remained in my memory. My great-grandmother told it to my grandmother, my grandmother told it to my mother, and my mother told it to me.

<sup>1</sup> Hunter College *Echo*.

It was on an autumn night, a long, long time ago, that an old beggar and his son Ivan were wandering through our Russian woods. They had been told in their northern village that in the city there was bread a-plenty, and gold to be had for the asking. "Ah," thought father and son, "if only we could get to the city, then all would be well with us"; but now it was days and days since they had come across a village, nay, since they had met a human being, and their provisions were running low; they had but one small loaf of black bread.

"My son," said the beggar, "there seems to be no way out of this trackless forest. We cannot help each other, and soon we shall have to give up; let us try our fortunes separately."

Then and there they broke their loaf of bread in two, wished each other the good fortune of reaching the city, and struck into different trails.

For a long, long time Ivan plodded on wearily through the woods. Brambles tore his feet, spiders' webs stuck to his face; sometimes a gray log under a bush struck terror to his heart from its very likeness to the bushy tail of the stealthy fox, and sometimes the breaking of a twig made him look around fearfully, fully expecting to see the glaring eyes of a lean, skulking wolf; and when a rabbit started from a bush, his heart ceased to beat, and he stood dazed till long after the frightened rabbit had scurried across his path. Soon, however, he noticed that the trees were getting thinner and at times rays of light penetrated through the long vistas, and played on the hoary tree-trunks, and made the crimson leaves of the birch flame in sombre color; and as he walked on with quickened steps he caught sight of patches of rosy sky through the dense foliage.

Ivan's heart beat with fear lest this should prove only another disappointment. Perhaps it was only a clearing! But as he emerged, he saw before him a wide dun-colored morass stretching as far — as far as eye could see, and beyond it the big red

sun sinking behind a clump of trees at its edge. Ivan fell on his knees and gave thanks, and then sat down to munch his bread.

After he had rested for some time, he started across the morass. The air had grown blue, and dragon-flies flew by, flapping their wings against his face. A bull-frog croaked at his feet, and a whole chorus of frogs took up the cry all over the morass. Poor Ivan was beginning to feel as disheartened with the moor as he had been with the forest, but soon he caught sight of a little light shining in the distant clump of trees.

He made his way through the swamp toward the glimmering light. At every step his feet sank in the mud and he no sooner drew one foot out, than "soomp," the other one sank. At last, wet and tired, he reached the light. But it did not come from a house. What he saw was but a tumble-down mill, and the ruins looked ghastly in the flickering of the torch. Ivan caught sight of a large sieve suspended between two beams, and he climbed into it and fell fast asleep.

Toward midnight he awoke with a start. There were sounds of laughter and talking. He peered through the sieve; for a time he was dazzled by the glare of a bon-fire, which, as it flared up, illumined a strange array of silver flagons and tankards and beakers, and made ponderous silver forks and spoons send out beams of light; his eyes were held fascinated by the gleam of many shining knives. Gradually the sound of voices gained on his ears. His eyes slowly became unriveted from the glittering hoard and traveled to the grim and swarthy faces, rendered more fierce and more mysterious in the red glare of the fire. He saw their mouths move and then, with a start, he seemed to awake, and the full meaning of their speech dawned upon him; they were a band of robbers discussing a plan for a raid on the neighboring village. Ivan held his breath in fear. His nose began to itch, but he was afraid to stir. He felt he was going to sneeze; he tried to stifle it, but too late. He had



sneezed. For a moment there was silence among the band and then one robber cried:

"Ho, brother, there's some one here!" and they ran to the sieve and dragged him forth.

"You've heard all we said?"

"Yes," murmured the boy in a trembling voice.

"Let's hang him."

"No, drown him."

"Oh, no, let's bind him to a tree and leave him to starve in the forest."

And they were about to drag him off, when the chief of the band said, "Let's take him to help on the raid."

It was a capital idea. The chief turned to Ivan with unsheathed sword.

"If you come with us and help us on this raid, and obey all orders, we'll adopt you into the band. If not, we'll kill you. Choose."

"I'll go," sobbed Ivan.

The robbers blindfolded him and led him over hill and down dale; once they stopped in a wood and the leader commanded the young men to hew down saplings. They cut some young oaks and trimmed them and started again on their way. When they emerged from the wood, a halt was ordered. Some one unbound Ivan's eyes. He saw a sleeping village lying before them. With stealthy steps the band approached the village storehouse, for in olden times, you know, the peasants had no ice-boxes or storage houses like those we have to-day, and they used to dig a deep cellar in the earth, cover it with a small wooden shed, and keep all their good things in this one storehouse. The thieves slipped the poles under the shed and after some difficulty managed to raise it a few inches.

"Get in there and hand out everything you find," they commanded Ivan.

The boy crept into the cellar, and then by the light of a candle began to hand out the precious stores. There were cakes of nice yellow butter that the peasant wives had been preparing for the winter, and big earthenware jars of rich cream in the process of getting sour, and fine white flat cheeses. There were big rolls of heavy linen that the peasant girls had bleached by the brook, and rolls and rolls of bright red and green and yellow-checkered cloth that the village damsels had spun and stored away for their dower.

"Is that all?" called the robbers at last.

"That's all," said Ivan, "except a pot of ashes," and he turned to reach for that.

Ivan heard a scraping sound, and then a thump, as the shed struck the earth. He lit a match, only to see that the robbers had pulled out the levers, and he was a prisoner in the empty shed. He called to them; he cried, but they only laughed in answer, and soon he heard their footsteps die away in the night. He sat down on the pot of ashes and waited. He knew it was morning when a cock began to crow; and later a dog began to bark, and other dogs all over the village barked in answer. After a while he heard a door open, and then the pulleys of the well began to creak. Ivan's fear increased with every moment. They'd surely kill him if they found him there in the empty pantry. Then footsteps approached and keys clinked as some housewife fumbled at the door. Quick as thought Ivan flung a handful of ashes at her face, and, brushing past her, he ran.

He ran, and he ran, and he ran, until he couldn't run any more.

For some time he heard the cries of men and the barking of dogs in pursuit, but they were far behind, because it took a long time for the woman to rub the ashes from her eyes, and then a longer time to gather her wits, see what had happened, and arouse the village.

And still he ran on. Toward noon he came to a wide field where peasants were reaping, and peasant women with their bright kerchiefs tied jauntily behind their heads, and their aprons tucked under at either side, were walking behind them, gathering the sheaves, and with deft fingers tying up the stacks of rye.

Ivan watched the gleaming scythes flash with a "sshk-sshk," and then the yellow stalks fall. He listened to the peasant girls singing merrily a harvest song, but he was hungry. Soon he saw a young woman go to her baby, who was sleeping at one side, and begin to rock the cradle. Ivan approached her.

"Please may I have something to eat? I'm so hungry."

The woman looked at his tired face and eager eyes, and then at her chubby baby; then she took out a couple of baked potatoes and gave them to him.

"That's all I have now, my boy, but if you'll go home with me soon I'll give you some more, and if you'll mind my baby I'll always keep you and feed you well."

Ivan sat down and rocked the baby. Later, when the sun was low in the heavens, they all went home and took him along. It was long since Ivan had tasted such a fine dinner! They gave him a big earthen-ware bowl of nice flaky mashed potatoes, with one of those yellow wooden spoons, like those grandma used to have, and a big bowlful of steaming "kapusta" — that's cabbage soup, the peasants' favorite dish, you know; and they gave him a great big crust of brown bread with a pinch of blessed salt.

After dinner the peasant woman told Ivan to sit down on the stove, for in olden times, you know, they had big brick ovens like — like — let's see, — like a giraffe. The fire was at what would be the knees of the giraffe's forelegs. The chimney would be the giraffe's neck and head, and the part that corresponds to the giraffe's back was used as a couch. And a fine couch it was,



rather hard, but nice and warm, so that you could comfortably bake your calves and take a fine nap. Well, she told Ivan to sit on the stove, lean against the distaff that stood at the side, and take the baby in his lap, and then she went away to the field. Ivan sat, and sat, and sat, and the baby slept on his lap.

He stared at the little diamond-paned window, which was fly-stained and broken, so that a little pillow was stuffed in the hole to keep the air out; he stared at the earthen floor where the yellow sand was sprinkled; at the copper samovar in the corner, which was sending a long ray of dull light from the burnished surface, and at the picture over the pallet, a gaudy, gilt-framed picture of the Czar, with his gleaming epaulets and medals, and shining crown. It was so nice, and quiet, and drowsy! Only the chubby baby was heavy. Through half-shut eyes Ivan looked at the smoke-begrimed rafters on the ceiling, and watched the flies crawling along. He wondered why they didn't fall off, and then, — and then he dozed.

There was a thump and a crash! Ivan opened his eyes sleepily — there lay the baby on the floor and the distaff on top of her.

In a moment he was awake. Off the stove he jumped, and without stopping to look at the baby, he ran, and he ran, and he ran, until he couldn't run any more. Over hill he ran, and down dale, and through woods and past stubbly wheat fields, vowing that if he ever came again to a village, and if a woman offered to give him shelter, it should be a woman without a baby, for he'd rather starve than mind another baby.

At last, when the sun had set, and dark shadows settled down over the field, he saw the lights of a village glimmering and twinkling in the distance. At the outskirts of the village he came to a little house separated from the rest, a little house made of rough-hewn logs with moss stuffed in between to keep the wind out, and with an old straw-thatched roof projecting on

all sides like a stiff night-cap. Ivan could hear little piggies grunting in the sty, and an occasional cackle and sleepy cluck from the hen as she lost her balance on the roost. He looked in through the little diamond-paned window, and, seeing no children, he lifted the latch and walked into the house.

A kindly old couple lived in this house, and they gave him some bread and clear water from the neighboring well, and they promised to keep him as their own.

But after supper the peasant woman was taken suddenly ill. Someone had to go fetch the Old Wise Woman of the village, for in olden times, you know, there were no doctors, and the oldest woman in the village did all the curing and killing. She had all kinds of dried herbs, and toadstools, and dried snakes. She could say a charm to drive away the toothache, and another one to stop bleeding when little girls cut their fingers, and a hundred and one charms to drive away the Evil One. She was a very important personage in the village, more important even than the priest.

But who was to go to fetch her? The peasant couldn't leave his wife alone in pain. Ivan did not know where she was to be found.

"Go, my son," said the peasant. "You'll find her soon enough. She lives in the last house at the other end of the village."

And Ivan went.

He found her house and persuaded her to come, but the Old Wise Woman was very, very old, and she couldn't walk. If any one was in need of her priceless services, why, then he had to carry her. So Ivan took her on his back and began to carry her. But oh, she was terribly heavy. He trudged along bravely, bent under her weight. At every two steps he stopped to rest her on the fence, and he straightened his poor, tired back. But soon he came to the part of the village where there were no

more fences; his back was almost breaking in two. At last he came to a well, and rested her on the edge. But as luck would have it, the foolish Old Wise Woman fidgeted about, and plump, she fell into the well!

Poor Ivan was in despair. If he should go back to the peasant he would be whipped for not bringing the Old Wise Woman. If he should go back to the village he would be killed for drowning the precious Old Wise Woman. So he ran.

And he ran, and he ran, and he ran, until he couldn't run any more. Once again he was in a swamp. He pulled one foot out of the mud and "soomp," the other one went in, and when he pulled that one out, "soomp," the other one sank. Again the frogs croaked, and now the man in the moon followed him wherever he went. Again he saw a light glimmering in the distance and he made his way toward it. He was at the ruined mill again, but this time the robbers were already there, and they caught sight of him before he could hide.

"Aha," they cried, "you alive yet? We'll fix you."

They took an empty wine cask and threw him in and nailed it up.

"Now, my fine fellow," they laughed, "see if you can escape us this time," and they went away.

Poor Ivan cried and cried. He reviewed his whole life and he thought of that far away northern village which he had left to go to the city. That wonderful city — and he would never be able to see it.

Soon he heard a heavy, rolling tread. A big black bear was coming toward him. The bear sniffed at the barrel — he smelled something good. Around and around the barrel he went, but there was no way of getting at that something good. At last he spied a hole and tried to put his nozzle in. Ivan's heart leaped with terror. But the bear's nozzle couldn't go in; the hole was too small. Then the bear sat down to think, for bears can think,



you know. Then he got an idea. He walked over to the barrel and put his tail in through the hole.

Ivan grabbed hold of the tail. This time it was the bear that started in terror; and he ran, dragging the barrel after him.

And he ran, and he ran, and he ran. Through the woods he went, but Ivan held on to the tail, and the cask went bumping along. Over hills he ran, and the terrible cask caught at his legs. Through valleys he ran, and still more terrified he grew, and still Ivan held on to the tail. The poor bear was at his wits' end — it's no joke to have an innocent-looking barrel get hold of your tail and get suddenly attached to you. So he ran, and the faster he ran the faster it followed. The bear grew furious, and in his despair he turned to the lair of his wise enemies — to the city. Along the highway he ran to the city, with the barrel rolling after him. Into the city he came, and as the much-shaken barrel struck the sharp cobblestones it split into a thousand splinters, and Ivan found himself standing, somewhat dazed, to be sure, in the middle of the city street.

And as for the bear — the strain on his tail was too much. He left it in Ivan's hands. By the way, that's how the bear lost his tail, and he's never had one since.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE ONE-ACT PLAY

**Short story and one-act play.** — When we were writing fiction in the form of the realistic short story and, through this writing and through our reading and our analysis of our reading, learning something about how the short story is written, we so emphasized its analogy to drama that, if we recall that analysis and practice, we may apply it now with equal force to the one-act play.

**Originating in struggle.** — Our short story originated in struggle; so does our one-act play. As we go over in our mind one-act plays that we have seen or read, we remember the struggle of an unattractive, unloved little waif to make herself seem desired and desirable; the struggle of an old woman without menfolk in the war to establish herself as a patriotic British subject by begging, borrowing, or stealing a soldier; the struggle between a woman's clodlike immobility and the insults and injuries that goad her to a moment of passion; the struggle between a mother's agonized longing for some little luxuries for her baby and her husband's high sense of honor in his tragic losing fight to win even the barest necessities; between a girl's independence and a man's smug condescension; between the desire of two old women to see a great actress and their feeling that it would be extravagant and wicked; between the mother who would choose one way of life for her children and the children who would choose another; between the square peg and the round hole; between the gleaming vision and the disappointing fulfilment.

**Limited by what we know of life.** — Our realistic short story was limited to what we really knew about life. We chose an

environment that we knew and people that we knew, and our story grew in accordance with what we knew of life. So it is with the realistic play. Again, as play after play comes to mind, can we doubt Eugene O'Neill's knowledge of ships and sailors, or John Synge's of Irish country folk, or Susan Glaspell's or Zona Gale's of the characters in such plays as "Trifles" and "Neighbors"?

**Limited by the possibilities of the playhouse.** — Just as the manner of our story was determined, moreover, by the method of fiction, so is the manner of our play determined by the possibilities of the playhouse. To be a play, a story must be so constructed as to be presented by actors, on a stage, before an audience. It is to be acted rather than to be read; or, if it is read, then by a reader who stages and acts the play in the theater of his mind. The playwright is limited, then, to a story that can be made intelligible and interesting by being acted. Whatever the audience does not see and hear, it cannot know. The story is not told, but *shown* through movements and sounds.

**Limited to one setting and to one time.** — To this requirement, which conditions all drama, full-length as well as one-act, must be added the demands peculiar to the one-act play. It is limited to one scene and to a time that is continuous. Some playwrights, it is true, permit themselves the device of dropping the curtain in a one-act play to suggest a lapse of time, but the interval thus indicated must be short, no more than a couple of hours, or it will not convince an audience. Some look askance at this practice and demand an unbroken sequence of time in the unchanging setting. But whether the curtain falls or not, all are agreed that the one-act play, like the short story, must have singleness of effect. Within its narrow space it cannot afford to wander; it must have insistent unity.

**Sources of play ideas.** — The idea of a play, like the idea of a story, may spring from anything. We may be interested in a



character and we may construct a play that will exhibit him in his most characteristic guise, as show-off, as grumpy old man, as sanctimonious hypocrite, as dreamer. We may be interested in an environment — a village post office, a neighborhood store, a roof where women come to hang out the clothes, — and we may supply it with characters and an action that will show its social implications. We may be interested in an idea and we may embody it in a concrete objective manifestation. This, however, is usually difficult. What begins as an abstraction often persists in remaining an abstraction to the end and resisting all our attempts to give it “a local habitation and a name.” One student in a group wished to give dramatic form to the conflict between her earlier anticipations of the measureless vistas of college life and her later conviction that it had nothing to offer but cramped horizons. What she wrote was merely argument in the form of duologue: one speaker, who, for all the personality she had, may be called A, wordily disputed the matter with a woman of straw who may be called B and whom she easily silenced, the duologue then becoming a monologue. Another student thought that she wanted to build a play upon her horror of religious prejudice, but what she had planned was only an essay, a monologue with a moment of dramatic incident as its spring-board.

**Genesis of a play.** — A student felt that there was material for a play in a neighborhood shop which she knew very well, a shoe-store which served a little community as distinct in itself from the rest of the city as a small town. One of the salesmen was a young fellow who worked in the store to pay his way through the evening course in a law school. He seemed an attractive boy, shy yet wistfully eager for companionship, his days too taken up with his double life as wage earner and student to leave him time to live as just a young man. Another clerk was an old German with an irascible manner and a sen-

tentious utterance, who assumed the right to give every one the benefit of his advice.

Thus far the prospective playwright had setting and characters, but no plot. Had she in mind a drama of drab or somber tone? No, the young man, with his shy eagerness, seemed to enjoy his work in the store. She thought a tone of wistful sentiment would be appropriate. Some one suggested the possibility of a whimsical analogy between the young student fitting shoes in a shoe-store and the young prince fitting a slipper on Cinderella. With this, the play approached plot. And because it now had a touch of fantasy, it was conceded that it might follow its Cinderella's-slipper motive even if this took it a little out of the path that life follows in most shoe-stores.

**Constructing the stage setting.** — The playwright was now ready to construct a setting for her play, so that she might proceed to plan it in detail with this background clearly in her mind. It was simple enough to build a shoe-store, with shelves of boxes, benches, a few footstools and a foot mirror. Her setting, however, had to provide a place where the old German could see what was going on and, when necessary, comment on it and yet where he would not be so conspicuous as to distract attention from the young clerk. This problem she solved by erecting a balcony at the rear of the stage, where the old man, seated at a desk, would letter display cards through the greater part of the play. He would sit with his back to the store; yet he would hear what was said, and, with shrug and gesture and exclamation, he would provide a running commentary on it. Then, too, the store had to give prominence to the slipper that was to figure in the play. It would be a silver slipper and it would be displayed, brilliantly lighted, in a small glass case. This case had to be placed so that it would catch and hold the eye and yet so that it would not interfere with the vision of the audience and the grouping of characters on the

stage. It was decided to raise it on a pedestal in the center of the rear of the stage, under the balcony. All this the playwright worked out in diagram. If she had had a particularly difficult problem of construction, she would have made a little model of the stage and would have worked with that. In planning her setting, too, she was careful not to demand anything too elaborate or too expensive for the producer of a one-act play to grant.

**Building the plot.** — Her plot now shaped itself as the quest of the student clerk, urged on by the old German, for a girl to invite to his class dance. Hal Crane has not been going to any of his class affairs because he doesn't know any girls. Girls, he says, take up a lot of time. If you haven't been going about with them, you can't, when there's a dance, just walk up to a girl and ask her to go with you. Besides, *any* girl won't do. Prodded by the questions of the older man, he admits that she would have to be pretty, a good dancer, the sort that the fellows would like, and — well, nice. The old man insists that she ought to have more solid qualifications than these. As they talk about the sort of girl one should take to a dance and about the slippers that they are arranging in the case, the idea comes, partly to the boy, partly to the man, that the choice of a pair of shoes is as good a test as any for a dancing partner — or, indeed, even for a wife! After all, the man reminds the boy, he knows pretty well the girls of the neighborhood who have been coming to the shop ever since he has been working there. Why shouldn't he ask one of these girls, the one who shall be designated by her judgment and taste in selecting slippers? He'd have her character in a nutshell — or a slipper.

The playwright now asked herself whether she should carry on this motive through a sequence of three or four episodes of different girls trying on shoes; or whether she should limit the girls to two strongly contrasted characters. Would it be con-



vincing to have only young women enter the store, or should the sequence be broken by other customers? If such other episodes are introduced, how can they be made to contribute to the theme of the play? Dare one delay the entrance of the true Cinderella until the end of the play? If she must be present early, how can there be suspense? These problems the playwright attempted to solve in the following manner.

While the boy hesitates about the slipper test and the man returns to his lettering, Miss Graham enters, a sweet-looking, quietly dressed girl. The boy looks at her with a quick new interest. But she has come for a pair of round-toed, flat-heeled pumps in dull black leather. The store does not carry them. Hal tempts her with this pretty slipper and with that, but she is inflexible. At last he goes to the case and proudly holds up the silver slipper. It is enchanting — she must try it on. Her foot looks slim and lovely in it, but she comes back to earth with “Goodness, it was never meant to be walked in.” It is neither practical nor sensible. Mr. Erden coughs approvingly. Miss Graham is sorry; she will have to try somewhere else. The boy, disconsolate, says nothing, although Mr. Erden is waiting expectantly, his brush halfway to his card.

Then the old man frowns and settles himself with his back squarely to the store, as he sees Miss Elton enter. She is frankly but effectively rouged. Her short street dress and her little hat are the latest. She wants evening slippers, and, after a short skirmish over lesser shoes, he triumphantly brings forth the silver slipper. Of course, she’ll take a pair like that! Then, while Hal is stumbling over the speeches that should ask her to the dance, Mr. Erden, on his balcony, drops rulers, exclaims in muttered German, tears up the card he has been working on; so that Hal, disconcerted, doesn’t ask her after all.

At this point, the playwright decided to introduce an episode which should not belong to the Cinderella sequence, but which

should not destroy the unity of the play because it would confirm the idea that character is shown in choice of footwear. Mrs. Weber, sensible and unfashionable, enters with her daughter Alice, who will wear only what "all the girls" in high school are wearing. They wrangle over the question of oxfords or pumps, Alice winning the battle. Going out, Alice is enraptured by the silver slippers. When she's a senior —! Mrs. Weber insists that nothing is pretty unless it is suitable — not even silver slippers.

Then, to Hal's astonishment, Miss Graham returns. She has found her pair of round-toed, flat-heeled pumps, but she has not been able to banish from her mind the silver slippers. She tries them on again. In her excitement over them, she is appealing and girlish. Hal too is excited. He looks at the gallery where Mr. Erden bends an unresponsive back over his work. He cannot ask her in the old man's hearing! He pretends that one of the buttons needs fastening. She would wait for the slippers, but he will not hear of this. He insists that he will bring them right around. She goes. He appeals to Mr. Erden to mind the store for a few minutes. The old man is unsympathetic. A girl who abandons her sensible ideas for a silver slipper! But Hal likes a girl who can have round-toed moments for the street and silver-toed moments for the dance. The slippers under his arm, he rushes, hatless, for the door. As he reaches it, he turns. He bets she can dance! The curtain falls.

**Writing the scenario.** — At this point, when setting, characters, and plot are defined with sufficient distinctness, the playwright, with the other members of her group whose plays have been coming along with hers, writes a scenario, much as she did for her short story, except that she prefaces it, as she will her play a little later, with a list of characters in the order of their first appearance, with a brief statement of the time and place of the play, and with a detailed description of the setting and of

the characters on the stage as the curtain rises. As any additional character enters, she inserts a description of her at the moment of her entrance. In this way she holds her setting and her people before her eyes at every stage of her writing of the play.

Her first page reads:

### A SLIPPER FOR CINDERELLA <sup>1</sup>

#### *Persons of the Play*

HAL CRANE, a young law student working in a shoe-store.

MR. ERDEN, an old German, employee in the store.

MISS GRAHAM, a customer, a very nice girl.

MISS ELTON, another customer, not so nice.

MRS. WEBER, a sensible mother.

ALICE WEBER, her high school daughter, not so sensible.

SCENE: In a shoe-store in Newark, New Jersey.

TIME: On a Saturday morning in spring, about nine o'clock

*We are in a small shoe-store. Rows of boxes line the walls. At the center of the rear of the store there is a little glass case displaying under brilliant lights a pair of silver slippers, a pair of rhinestone buckles, and a pair of silver stockings. On either side of the case, rows of benches are set, running to the sides of the store. At the center of the left wall, a door forms the street entrance. Across the back of the stage extends a balcony. On the balcony, directly over the case, an old man is seated at a desk, where, with his back to the store, he paints display cards. He sits hunched over his work, and from the rear he looks short and stout, grizzled and snuffy. A staircase at the right back leads from the balcony to the floor of the store. At the right, in front of the benches, are a couple of footstools and a foot mirror.*

*The curtain rises upon a store empty of customers. Hal Crane is arranging the slippers in the display case. He is about twenty, a student at an evening law school. It may be his shy smile and his eagerness to please that make him popular with the customers in Hackett's Shoe Store. Besides, he is a good-looking fellow, tall and slight, with a*

<sup>1</sup> *A Slipper for Cinderella*, Florence Hass.



*“collegiate” taste in ties and socks. Now he is whistling “Love Sends a Little Gift of Roses” as he arranges the case. He interrupts his song and calls up to Mr. Erden on the balcony.*

Into her stage picture the playwright has put all necessary details — doors that are to be opened, stairs that are to be climbed, articles that are to be used. She has avoided terms that would remind her of her scene as a stage setting, and not as a real shop. She has written concisely, and yet she has not tried to be entirely matter-of-fact and impersonal. Her tone will help the producer to get the atmosphere of the play. Then, too, she must provide for those readers who, as mental producers, will enjoy the hint of mood.

If all members of a group have not been able to keep up with those who now have their play in hand sufficiently to write a scenario, they may use for this purpose their own short stories, if these can have a one-act play sliced from them — right before the climax, perhaps, and after the turning-point; or from the turning-point through the catastrophe. Or they may adapt any short story that can be made to meet the demands of the one-act play.

This scenario will go on from the opening descriptions to a brief but concrete and detailed account of all that is said and done on the stage. It will note all entrances and exits at the moment when they occur. It will insert a description of each character at his entrance, as in the play itself. It will not give any information that cannot be imparted by acting.

The scenarios will be criticized by the teacher and brought before the class for their comment. Perhaps one asks for action that is impossible on a stage, or for a cast that is too large or for scenic effects that are too difficult and costly for a one-act play. Perhaps another leans heavily on improbable chance or coincidence instead of letting the play grow out of character. Perhaps here a foundation has not been laid for what is to come

after; and when it comes, it is with the crash of an unbelievable surprise. Perhaps there a situation has been passed over so quickly that the audience has not had time to understand its implications. For, although the one-act play cannot be too deliberate, young playwrights are more likely to make it rush on with breathless haste than to delay it unduly. After the playwrights have reconstructed the scenarios according to the suggestions that they find helpful, they will then be ready to use them as guiding plans for plays.

**Dialogue in the play.** — The play, developing through action, gesture, and speech, will proceed very much as did the short story. The playwrights will test their dialogue by constant comparison with everyday speech. Even more than the speech of the short story, the speech of the drama must have the accent of life because it must submit to the proof of being actually spoken. It will have the fragments of sentences and the contractions of verb forms that we noted for our short story. Characters will begin to speak, hesitate, break off. No one will be permitted a long block of speech without interruption. Where a gesture or a movement alone is sufficient, no word will be added.

**Stage business.** — Words said will be accompanied by stage directions indicating tone and gesture. This stage business is as important as the speeches. It cannot, as young playwrights sometimes suppose, be left to the discretion of the actors. The actors may suggest valuable additions or changes, but, after all, it is not they who are composing the play. The author must work out for them all the detail of expression, tone, attitude, gesture, movement; he must write it all into his manuscript.

**The opening of the play.** — The opening of the play, like the opening of the story, presents a special problem. How shall the playwright let his audience know the conditions out of which the action of the play grows? The method is much the same

as in the short story that opens with a scene: the information is conveyed indirectly through speech and action, not too obviously designed to serve an ulterior purpose — the enlightenment of the audience — but apparently spontaneous. Unobtrusively, the first few minutes of the play must make clear to its audience the characters and the circumstances. And it must at the same time interest — or it may not have an audience. How does our “Cinderella” playwright meet these requirements with the first moments of her play?

HAL. Got the sign done yet, Mr. Erden? I need it.

MR. ERDEN. (*Without looking up.*) Hm, what you think — I work like a steam engine? You'll get it as soon as it's dry. (*Hal whistles on, arranging the shoes first in one position, then in another.*)

MR. ERDEN. (*He rises painfully from his desk and comes down the steps in a careful, precise walk to the case.*) Here, how's this? (*He holds out the card and reads.*) “Fashion dictates sheer hose and high heels.” (*He hands the card to Hal with evident pride.*)

HAL. (*He takes the sign and looks at it.*) I like “Fashion dictates.” It gives an air. (*He tries to place the sign.*) Let's see. I'll put it here. No, this won't do. Here! (*He stands off and surveys his work. The old man does so too.*)

MR. ERDEN. Na, na, I don't like it! I'd put the rhinestone buckles here (*He points.*) and the silver slippers resting on the silver hose to show them off better. Try it! (*Hal does.*) Such a difference! (*Sententiously.*) It may seem a small thing to you, but success in life comes from small things piled high. You ought to make it your business to get the finest effects in shoes and stockings even though you're going to be a lawyer.

HAL. (*He inspects the case.*) Um. It is better. Thanks. (*He views the case from a distance.*) It's really a very good-looking display, if I must say it myself. (*He yawns and stretches.*) I hope we're not very busy to-day. I'm tired to death.

MR. ERDEN. Tired? (*He looks at him sharply.*) Up again till three this morning studying, nicht wahr?

HAL. (*Apologetically.*) Only this once. I had to finish my brief. (*Hal dusts the benches while Mr. Erden leans against the case.*)



MR. ERDEN. So, so. This is not what I would have called life when I was a boy. Work here from nine in the morning till six at night. Go to school from seven to ten. Study, eat, and sleep in between times. (*He shakes his head.*) Any one ever tell *you* not to waste time? I guess not! No time to play — no time to go to a theatre or a dance, once in a while, eh?

HAL. (*He looks up with interest.*) Dance? Our class is running one at the Washington next Saturday. I'd rather like to go.

MR. ERDEN. (*He looks at him quizzically.*) Well?

HAL. (*Hesitatingly.*) I guess I'm not going.

MR. ERDEN. (*Severely.*) And why not, young man?

HAL. (*He tries to carry off his disappointment with his light manner.*) I haven't a sister to take, so I guess it'll be home for me.

MR. ERDEN. (*He fairly shouts, in his astonishment.*) Sister!

HAL. Why, yes. I'm sure if I had one, I'd take her.

MR. ERDEN. Ach, you baby! Do you really think young fellows take their *sisters* to a dance? Ask them, and let them laugh at you! My, My! Who was the girl you took to the last school dance?

HAL. (*Shamefacedly.*) I told you I was going, but I didn't go because I didn't know any girl to ask. Don't you see? (*He stops dusting and faces Mr. Erden to defend himself.*) I can't ask a nice girl to go to a dance just when I want her to. (*Mr. Erden makes an impatient movement as if to interrupt, but the boy hurries on.*) I haven't time to spend on girls. You know, it takes an awful lot of time! And now when I'd give up a Saturday evening, and not study, why — there's no one to ask to go with me.

MR. ERDEN. (*He walks up and down in disgust.*) My, but you're anxious to go to this dance! When I was a young man, did some one have to coax me to find a nice girl to take to a dance?

**As the play goes on.** — As the play goes on, any interest it has succeeded in arousing must not be permitted to lapse. It must be carried forward increasingly through episode after episode. In the process of writing, more telling situations may develop than those which were planned in the scenario. The scenario, then, should be considered not final but tentative, to take advantage of these more dramatic ideas that come through ab-

sorption in the play. And the play, like the short story, will end with the catastrophe, or very shortly after it.

**Putting the play on paper.** — To get the play on paper in correct form, the student may pattern after any volume of printed plays. The main object is so to differentiate between speech and stage business that the manuscript is easily read. The name of the character is placed, sometimes in the center of the line above his speech, sometimes at the left of the first line of his speech. Stage directions are set off with parentheses and are often typed in red. When they are of sufficient length to be paragraphed, all lines after the first are indented. Dialogue is double-spaced; stage directions are single-spaced. Acting time is usually a minute to a page, a twenty to thirty minute play thus requiring a twenty to thirty page manuscript.

**Rehearsing and rewriting.** — Putting the play on paper ends the first stage. Now, if time permits, the play should be read in class, the parts being taken each by a different student. If class time cannot be spared, groups of students who are interested in the drama will probably find time out of class to work together on their plays. Often a class in spoken English will be willing to take one or two such plays as these and present them as class exercises. Or a college dramatic association will produce a play. While the plays are being read or rehearsed, they will be rewritten and rewritten. With the play living before her, the playwright will want to bring out character more clearly here; to make this bit of dialogue more natural; to provide stage business to carry a character over an awkward empty pause. I can hear an actress exclaim in irritation, "What am *I* expected to be doing all this time? Remember, I'm still on the stage." A situation may have to be held until every one in the audience has had an opportunity to grasp it; preparation may have to be made for the entrance of a character, or for an important action. It may be necessary to get persons on or off the stage more

deftly. The comment of the actors and of the audience should be heeded.

**Reading and seeing plays.** — While students are writing plays, they should not only think plays and talk plays, but also read plays and see plays. Publications of one-act plays are plentiful. To mention only a few of the many, there are volumes of one-act plays by Eugene O'Neill, Lady Gregory, James M. Barrie, St. John Ervine, Alice Brown, Susan Glaspell, Lewis Beach, George Calderon, Bosworth Crocker, George Middleton. There are such collections of one-act plays as *The 47 Workshop Plays*, *Plays of the Harvard Dramatic Club*, *Wisconsin Plays*. There are numerous anthologies of representative contemporary one-act plays by one editor or another. It is to be regretted that productions of one-act plays are not so numerous; that they are, in fact, very rare. It is possible, however, to gain much for the one-act play from productions of three-act plays.

Students of the play should analyze plays to see how their own problems of dramatic construction and development are met by playwrights of experience. They should come to plays, in books or on the stage, with a fresh and open mind. They should follow with interest what is new in dramatic writing or in stagecraft. They should read reviews of plays in newspapers and magazines.

**Plays of folk and fairy lore.** — Instead of writing a realistic play, some students may have preferred to write a play like the second of their stories, a fantasy or a fairy play, a play symbolical, it may be, or allegorical. In this field they will find such writers as Maurice Maeterlinck, Lord Dunsany, John Synge. They will see what Edna St. Vincent Millay and Alfred Kreymborg have done with the fantastic play.

Their own play they may build very much as they built their story. They may again mingle the familiar and the marvelous, as Mr. Stuart Walker does in his delightful "Six Who Pass



While the Lentils Boil.” Here a homely kitchen, lentils boiling in a copper pot over the fire, and a little boy, watching them and waiting for his mother, figure in the same play with butterflies that talk, a fugitive queen, a mime, a juggler, and even a headsman.

**Their structure.** — “Six Who Pass” suggests, too, the pattern on which many fairy plays are built. To the little boy waiting on the stage come, one after the other, six characters. With them the little boy takes part in a series of episodes, alike in unity of purpose but increasing in tenseness of interest and suspense. In six steps the action rises to a breathless climax, after which it drops suddenly from an eagerly awaited turning-point to a triumphant catastrophe. “Three Pills in a Bottle,” Rachel Lyman Field’s charming play, builds, as its title indicates, with three. We take three steps up to the climax and three steps down to the catastrophe. Nor does the symmetry end here. In the rising action, the little boy of the three pills in vain coaxes three passers-by — a rich man, a scissors-grinder, and a scrubwoman — to stop and play with him. At the boy’s request — although they seem doubtful whether they have souls — their souls visit him, one after the other, and he gives to each soul one of the precious pills that were to have made him well and strong. Then, as rich man, scissors-grinder, and scrubwoman re-pass his window, the little boy sees with delight that his pills have made their souls so strong and happy that they now dominate the bodies they inhabit. Even the poor soul of the rich man is now able to dictate an act of kindness whereby the little boy’s mother may buy more pills.

Thus we may construct our fantastic plays with episode upon episode. Three is a good number for our pattern. Three may come to a witch’s cave for charms or philters; three may consult an oracle; three may woo a princess.

**Their source.** — The idea for our play may come from another

play or story. One author lifts the veil from "And they lived happily ever after" by writing a play on "Cinderella Married." Others have followed King Cophetua and his beggar maid into their domestic life after their marriage. These plays usually have a touch of whimsy, as do also such plays of historical burlesque as Maurice Baring and Laurence Housman have written.

The following short play grew out of talk in class about the old tale of the princess and the pea. It is a little too generously supplied with author's comment disguised as stage direction, but the tone of the play permits a little trifling with the severe conventions of the drama.

### THE PRINCESS <sup>1</sup>

*By Ethel M. Feuerlicht*

*Dramatis Personae.*

GARETH, the Prince.

The KING.

The QUEEN.

LAIS, a Princess.

JINNY.

TIME: April.

PLACE: The King's kitchen.

*The scene is a low-ceilinged, comfortable room, with a door at the left leading to an outer court and a window overlooking it. A potted geranium on the window-ledge lends a touch of color to the room which, to tell the truth, is only a kitchen, dressed up and disguised to hide its real identity. If we have a keen eye, however, we detect the sink, half out of sight in one corner; next to it*

<sup>1</sup> Hunter College *Echo*. Copyright by Ethel M. Feuerlicht.

*an ironing-board, beautifully covered with heavy dark purple material, to be sure, but still a common board. A curtain of the same rich material runs along the wall opposite the window, as far as the staircase to the rear, with a great clock at the foot of it. To speculate on the common things that may lie hid beneath this regal covering would be in decidedly bad taste. We need our good manners in this shabby-genteel room, dear friends, for it is the living-room of their Majesties, the King and Queen.*

*If we look sharp once more, we shall find that we are indeed in the very presence of the Royal Family. The King seems to feel very much at home. He is in his shirt-sleeves, leaning back in a morris-chair. His feet, encased in green carpet slippers, repose on a delicate but somewhat worn gold music-stool that bears his weight with laudable resignation and faithfulness.*

*The King has evidently been reading the fat book beside him — do we need to mention that it is Ike Walton's "Compleat Angler"? Now, however, his spectacles are pushed up on his forehead, giving his kindly jovial face a still more benignant air as he regards his wife. The good Queen, attired in a comfortable blue cotton housedress, with a dusting cap on her beautiful white hair — she always puts aside her crown for afternoon wear and for special occasions — has laid down the duster. She looks somewhat worried and anxious, and her glance travels from the great clock at the foot of the staircase to the Prince, busily writing at a little table near the window; then she looks hastily up the stairs and back at her husband again. The dark romantic head of the Prince is bent over his work. Even in this position he looks tall and slim in his suit of forest green.*

QUEEN. *(She is tying a gingham apron about her ample waist.)*  
It's taking her a sight of time to come down, dear.

KING. *(As emphatically as his comfortable position will allow.)*  
That proves it! The élite all sleep late. We never breakfasted



before dinner in the good old days. (*He nods reminiscently at the ironing-board.*)

QUEEN. (*Too worried to join him in his romantic recollections.*) Nonsense! She may be an actress, for that matter, instead of a princess. They do nothing but sleep, to judge by their looks.

KING. Anything wrong with her looks?

QUEEN. Oh, I almost forgot you hadn't seen her. (*Severely.*) Serves you right for staying out so late! With your rheumatism, too. (*She goes to the shelf over the sink and returns with a big black bottle.*) Here! take your medicine!

(*The King makes a grimace, sits bolt upright, with his eyes squeezed tight closed, and gulps down some of the inky fluid from a large mixing-spoon. The Queen, somewhat appeased, busies herself with setting the table.*)

KING. Ugh! (*Turns to Prince Gareth, who is biting the end of his quill-pen and gazing dreamily out of the window.*) Well, son, how's the sonnet?

GARETH. (*Starting.*) Oh, I . . . The deuced thing won't rhyme. You see, I was writing it to my (*quotes*) 'Dream Princess with eyes of deepest violet.'

KING. (*With evident pride in his son's poetical achievement.*) What's the matter with that?

GARETH. Nothing — nothing — but when she came last night I saw her eyes weren't violet.

KING. Can't you change the line?

GARETH. No. I had already made the second line —  
'Deign to share my coronet.'

Her eyes are hazel. Now what rhymes with hazel? Nothing.

KING. Why not change the second line? You know you haven't exactly got a coronet to share. It's three months since we —

GARETH. Sh!

(*They stop abruptly as the Queen looms in their direction, formid-*

able, like some calm but ominous battleship. Her intent is quite harmless, however; she suspects nothing of the fate of the Prince's coronet. In her hand she holds a tea-kettle with which, with all the dignity of a ceremonial, she proceeds to water the geranium. The two men watch her anxiously. The Prince breathes a sigh of relief as she returns to the table where she begins, for the third time, to rearrange the cutlery.)

GARETH. We'll have to get that coronet out of hock — it wouldn't do for mother to find out about it. I wish — (*Bites his pen.*)

KING. (*Feigning an avid interest in order to cheer Gareth. He has already had the story from the Queen, of course, but his is a kindly soul.*) What is she like? Do you think she'll do? How did she happen to come here?

GARETH. (*Dreamily.*) The rain pouring down in torrents — a sudden knock at the door — a clear voice demanding admission. Then she — the Dream Princess.

KING. Is she pretty?

GARETH. Like a rain-bedraggled flower. Slender, lissome, with a lovely throat and fine hands. A trifle too pale, perhaps, but imperious, ah, imperious.

KING. (*Now genuinely interested, not having had this sort of description from the Queen.*) Your mother told me she was bedraggled — drenched to the skin. Like a beggar-girl, she said.

GARETH. Yet prouder than a Queen.

KING. Has the test been tried, then?

GARETH. Mother wasn't sure that she mightn't be an imposter. Real princesses are rare these days. (*With the fine scorn of youth.*) Why, her hauteur dimmed our very sceptre. (*Points to sceptre, lying carelessly on the table.*) These two years have made mother less sensitive to real rank than before.

KING. And still she insists that you marry only a real princess. Caste sticks longer to a woman than anything else. Why,

I wouldn't object to your marrying some nice little girl whose blood wasn't strictly blue.

GARETH. (*Seriously.*) We have to keep up the tradition, you know.

KING. Yes, yes, I suppose so. (*Somewhat violently.*) Damn tradition! I have to do without tobacco, so that your mother can boast of keeping a servant.

GARETH. It's pleasant to have Jinny about the house.

KING. Yes — she's a nice little thing. She's been getting uppish this last week. (*The King slaps his knees rather uproariously at the recollection.*) I heard her tell the ice-man she wasn't "no common servant." "Lady-help," she calls herself. Ha! Ha! Mother's exclusiveness seems to be catching!

(*The Queen turns around, startled by his hearty laughter.*)

QUEEN. I should think you'd be too excited to laugh. (*Glances at the clock.*) It's eleven and she's not down yet. (*A sudden fear grips her.*) Perhaps —

(*The Prince, who has gone back to his 'sonnet' and is re-reading it with loving appreciation, looks up.*)

GARETH. What?

QUEEN. (*Fearfully.*) Perhaps she isn't a real princess!

KING. (*Briskly.*) Nonsense! Of course she is. What makes you think she's not?

QUEEN. Why hasn't she come down? If she's really a princess, as she claims to be, she hasn't slept a wink all night.

KING. You —

QUEEN. Yes. Jinny and I arranged the bed. We used the court-linen — I'm so glad we brought it with us. We piled seventeen quilts and seven blankets on the bed, all in one big soft heap.

KING. (*Waggishly, though he has made the joke on other occasions.*) And the poor little pea beneath all of that?

QUEEN. (*Impatiently, this time.*) A dried pea, of course,



stupid! If she's a real princess there's no doubt about her feeling it — it's hard enough.

KING. (*Jubilantly.*) Then she's felt it and your worries are settled for life! Hurray! No more scheming, no more scrimping, no more sacrifices —

QUEEN. (*With withering contempt.*) I suppose you're thinking of your tobacco. Men are so selfish.

KING. Unselfishness and devotion are a little wearing — on the rest of the family.

QUEEN. (*Bridling.*) Haven't I done my best? Haven't I faithfully tested every possible candidate? (*What with the excitement of the moment and the unkindness of her regal spouse, the Queen is not far away from tears.*)

KING. (*Sorry for the havoc he has wrought, pats Queen on the hand.*) Yes, yes, dear. But they were none of them genuine princesses. You started with Jinny, you remember.

GARETH. (*Apart, not listening to the conversation, quotes from his poem, to get the effect.*) 'Ah, her heart is right queenly!'

QUEEN. She said she had never 'slept so grand' in her whole life.

KING. Wholesome little thing — that's the way to live: work hard, sleep hard, love —

QUEEN. (*Suddenly throwing up her hands in a gesture of dismay.*) Augustus! How careless we are! It just shows how unused we've become to court ways.

KING. (*Startled by the sudden eruption.*) My dear, what's the matter?

QUEEN. Oh dear, we should have sent her breakfast up to her. That's why she hasn't been down — she's waiting for breakfast in bed. Oh, oh, I must get it ready.

(*The Queen darts away in a flutter of bewilderment. The King looks after her with an indulgent smile.*)

QUEEN. (*Looking wildly about.*) Where's the tray?

KING. Under the coronets.

*(Gareth, waked into consciousness by the last word, looks up from his labor of love. He and the King regard each other in consternation as the Queen approaches the purple curtains.)*

GARETH. *(Recovering himself.)* I'll get it for you, mother.

*(He springs up, waves her aside and extracts a silver tray from the closet behind the curtains. He looks with relief at his father, as the Queen begins to set the tray.)*

GARETH. *(In a whisper.)* Saved again! We must redeem that coronet before she finds out.

KING. *(Pessimistic for the first time in his whole jovial life.)* She'll discover it before long. Leave it to your mother.

QUEEN. *(Turning around and speaking all at once in breathless haste.)* Call Jinny. She's planted enough peas by this time. Hurry! Tell her to come in. Oh dear, why didn't it occur to me sooner? Gareth, go now! You two are no more help to me than two sticks. Call her! Augustus, cut the bread — quick!

*(Gareth rushes out of the door while the King very awkwardly, but all the more lovably, bungles with the bread. It is doubtful whether he will manage to get four slices out of the loaf — that is, if he gets so far — so thick and clumsy are the pieces he cuts. He views his work with the same loving satisfaction, however, with which his son regarded his own, some ten minutes back. The Queen is too busy with frantic futile rushings here and there to notice what he is doing to the bread.)*

*If the garden were a splendid royal affair, and did not correspond in size with the cozy little room, we might hear the Prince calling "Jinny! Jinny!" It is a modest little garden, however, and Jinny, despite the undeniable smallness of her person, has not taken long to find.*

*She comes in almost immediately, with the small quick movements of a bird. She has a basket of shelled peas under one arm —*

*her brown head is bare; the sleeves of her gingham dress are rolled up to the elbow, showing the strong young arms in all their fine vigor. Youth and brimming health have joined forces to make her thoroughly good to look at. If one were to select a flower for Jinny one would without any hesitation choose the pansy, which, you remember, our dear grandmothers called "heartsease.")*

JINNY. *(Setting the peas on the table, and taking the bread-knife out of the King's hand as she smilingly pushes him away.)*  
Come, sir, this isn't a job for you.

*(Just as the Queen startled him into assisting her, so Jinny charms him into settling back in the morris-chair, where he is soon lost in the delightful depths of his book. She deftly repairs the damage done the bread, places the slices on a plate and hands it to the Queen who is returning from the pantry with a glass of milk.)*

QUEEN. Where's Prince Gareth?

JINNY. He stayed a bit to pick some flowers for the lady.  
*(The Queen gives a satisfied little nod. She puts the finishing touches to the tray on which she has been placing the royal breakfast — a glass of milk, some fruit, and a dish of raspberry jam. It is unfortunate, dear friends, that it is only breakfast. It would be an immense satisfaction to discover just precisely what a dinner "fit for a king" would include. We have not the faintest idea, although we have spent many an hour in vain speculation thereon; perhaps, then, it is just as well that it is only breakfast, for it would never do for a dramatist to reveal such ignorance.)*

QUEEN. You may take this now, Jinny. Be sure to knock softly.

*(During her speech, a double action occurs on the stage. Gareth enters from the garden, two lovely fresh-blooming daffodils in his hand. It is evidently his intention to place these on the tray,*



*for although the Prince cannot write poetry, he is a poet at heart and knows that flowers are food and balm for the soul of a true princess.*

*Just as he enters, and as Jinny is about to lift up the tray, a door at the upper landing of the steps is violently slammed. The four people below start back. The King drops his book and looks in the direction of the noise. Jinny wheels about, her hand at her heart. The Queen sends one wild glance up the stairs, jerks off her dusting cap, draws the purple curtains and there, in the company of household commonplaces, two diadems are seen to repose. She thrusts one hastily, and crookedly, on her own head, dashes over to the King and deposits the other rakishly over his ear, looks swiftly, with a gesture of puzzled despair, at the Prince, and holds nervously on the table as the Princess descends.*

*How can we describe the curious yet compelling sight of Laïs the Princess, as she descends the stairs? To call her a Fury would be gross exaggeration, for there is no fire to her wrath; besides she still conserves most of her imperious air. One can tell at a glance that she is of gentle blood — yet she has none of the lovely quality of gentleness. The queenly calm of her being has been disturbed and the result is anything but charming. There seems to be, too, a distracting note in this whole composition of outraged queenliness and wilful indignation, but this is at first obscured by the great hauteur of her bearing. Halfway down the steps she faces the Queen.)*

LAÏS. I never saw such service in my life!

*(The Queen is speechless with surprise.)*

LAÏS. *(Frigidly.)* I left the palace last evening because the entertainment failed to amuse me. I was caught in the rain on my way back. I stopped here.

*(The Prince moves forward slightly as though about to speak.)*

LAÏS. *(Stamping her foot — we are sure that Jinny, who is*

*gently patting the Queen's arm, could do it much more adorably.)*  
The way I have been treated disgraces the hospitality of the kingdom. You, who make a point of your former royalty!

*(She looks about the room with a scornful glance that misses nothing, not even the poor common little ironing-board hidden beneath its royal covering.)*

You use the purple to hide all these disgusting common things beneath. *(Points to closet that the Queen, alas, has forgotten, in her haste, to close.)* Who ever heard of a Queen who did her own housework!

*(Jinny looks at her suddenly and in the little servant's eyes there shines something very fine and splendid.)*

LAIS. I condescend to spend the night in this place and you are so careless of my comfort as to keep me awake the whole night by some wretched little obstruction beneath the quilts. I can quite believe you have descended to the degradation of playing practical jokes, but that you should dare to practise them on me is unspeakable!

*(The Princess is white with indignation, but she has lost so much of her imperious air that the distracting note has become quite clear, even to the King's wholly masculine perceptions. It is this: The Princess is attired in a very odd fashion. Her gown is hooked in front instead of behind, and she has doubtlessly failed to thrust her feet into the corresponding slippers, for they present a very awkward and ungracious appearance. This, too, undoubtedly accounts for her lack of petulant charm when she stamps her foot. Her gloves hang limply from her arms and the pearls with which her hair has been caught up are twisted tightly about her forehead. Her hair itself looks somewhat out of gear, but of course the King cannot be expected to know why such is the case. Jinny could tell him that its unbeautiful state is due to the fact that the Princess, not versed in such matters, has dressed it too high, and that persons of her*

*slender height should never, never attempt to wear their hair high. The reason for this unbecoming disarray? Hush! Lais has resumed her tirade.)*

LAIS. Then after a wretched night no one was sent up to assist me. If my ladies-in-waiting but knew I was forced to dress myself! They would be overcome with horror and indignation! It has taken me three hours to dress!

*(If the Royal Family were not so taken aback by the force of the Princess' wrath, they might see that a smile has just sprung to life on Jinny's face. Whether this is due to the queer costume of the Princess or to another more subtle cause, we leave you, dear friends, to determine.)*

LAIS. *(Pointing to the ironing-board.)* There is the symbol of your poor attempt at royalty. You have the insignia — although I must say that the way you wear your crowns is disgusting — yet beneath the purple you are common, like that wooden board. You have lost the imperial air — you are of the people, not above them.

*(At this the Prince, who has been gazing at her as one bewitched, drops the flowers.)*

LAIS. You have done the unpardonable — you have tried to popularize the purple, and for this you will never be forgiven — not by royalty. *(Scornfully.)* Maybe the people will claim you as their own. You have lost the royal ways. *(To King.)* I have no doubt you use your sceptre for driving in nails.

*(The good man is completely overwhelmed by the accusation which, for all we know, may be perfectly true.)*

LAIS. Then remember this — I am the last person of quality who has deigned to address you.

*(In spite of the discomfort of her shoes and her train, which trails before her instead of following after, Lais sweeps majestically from the room. She manages to create a great deal of havoc on her way out, however. She upsets the basket of peas which, by*



*one of those strange chances, seems to have been placed there to symbolize the Queen's theory. She steps on the daffodils as she brushes by the Prince and disappears through the door.*

*From this point on, the play becomes almost entirely pantomimic. There is a dead silence in the room, broken at last by the sound of paper roughly torn apart. It is Gareth who is throwing the remains of his once beloved verses in the waste-basket. He sinks to the chair by the desk in an attitude of hopelessness.*

*The Queen, too, has sunk hopelessly on to the sofa. Jinny has removed the heavy crown, placing it on the floor, that being handiest; and after gently smoothing the Queen's hair, she busies herself with the scattered peas.*

*The King, who hates awkward silences, braces himself up — his crown also removed — and attempts, with a smile, to relieve the tension.)*

KING. Thank Heavens they deposed me!

JINNY. (*Looking up.*) Oh, sir, you mustn't talk like that. (*She rises, giving up the peas as a bad job, goes over to him, dusts off his lapels, etc., and makes him feel she's making him comfortable. Then she thrusts her hand into her apron pocket and brings out a small package which she drops into the King's hand.*)

KING. (*Rapturously.*) 'Baccy!

(*Jinny nods happily, then hushes him and points to the Queen who is looking thoroughly woebegone. He sticks the tobacco into his pocket, goes over and sits beside her. After a minute we can see that his genial good humor will do much to soothe her wounded feelings.*

*Meanwhile Jinny has been sweeping the peas into a corner of the room. Her eyes light on the daffodils; their freshness has been dimmed by royal feet. Jinny sets down the broom, and lifts up the flowers with surprising tenderness. She almost mothers them — she does in fact, when no one is looking except you and me, press her lips to them. Then abruptly she glances at Gareth,*

*weighed down by despair. Quickly she walks over and touches him on the arm. She holds out the flowers. He looks up for a minute, then resumes his despondent attitude.*

*Dear Jinny! It is she who is bruised now. She leaves the flowers at his side, and covering her face with her arm so that we may not see the tears, she goes out of the door.*

*Perhaps she walked suddenly into Gareth's heart with that light trembling step. Who are we to explain such a miracle? Why, however, does he look up and out through the window as she is about to pass by? Listen! He is calling her.)*

GARETH. Jinny!

*(She stops. The Prince is holding out his arms to her, and in his right hand there rests a daffodil.*

*Jinny leans forward through the open window, and the light in her eyes shines clearer than a hundred diadems. Gareth, dear friends, has at last found his real Princess.)*

## CHAPTER XX

### IN CONCLUSION

In the High and Far-Off Times, the Elephant's Child had gone through an arduous experience. His 'satiabile curiosity — and that means he asked ever so many questions — had led him far. He had whispered in the Crocodile's ear a question concerning his secret, and the Crocodile had caught him by his little nose and pulled. The Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock Snake, who talked as college professors are popularly — but ignorantly — supposed to talk, had admonished him, "Rash and inexperienced traveller, we will now seriously devote ourselves to a little high tension, because if we do not, it is my impression that yonder self-propelling man-of-war with the armour-plated upper deck" (and by this, O Best Beloved, he meant the Crocodile), "will permanently vitiate your future career." So they too had pulled — pulled with all their might. And now the Elephant's Child sat on the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River and sadly regarded his poor nose. To him came words of comfort and wisdom from his guide and counselor, the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake: "Some people do not know what is good for them." As the Elephant's Child used his painfully elongated nose to hit dead a fly that bothered him, "'Vantage number one!" said his mentor; as he plucked a bundle of grass and stuffed it into his mouth, "'Vantage number two"; and as he slapped cool mud over his hot head, "'Vantage number three."

Like the Elephant's Child, members of a class in composition travel far during a term's work, and most of them find it an



arduous experience. It is hoped that their curiosity has been insatiable and that they have asked many questions of those who have the answers. Most of them have pulled hard. Now, at the end of the term, they regard the result. What have they to show for hours of application in the classroom and more hours of effort at their writing table? Perhaps some of them are as dubious concerning the gain as the Elephant's Child.

Has their response to the world about them stretched in range and power to take in

The beauty and the wonder and the power,  
The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,  
Changes, surprises;

are they more richly aware, now, of "the absolute sight, and sound, and smell, and handling of things"? Has the life that goes on about them more interest and meaning for them, — fathers and mothers and children, friends and familiar speech, those who work and those who play? 'Vantage number one!

From their own limited experience do they turn to books for enlargement of that experience and for light upon it? Are they more sensitive now to the sincerity and the beauty of a work of literature? Do they take pleasure in a novel or a short story or a play in proportion as it creates life and as it gives that life the structure, the rhythm, the music harsh or tender that adequately express it? 'Vantage number two!

When they write, do they choose such subjects as lie within their own personal observation and experience? Do they try to say what they have to say clearly, concretely, effectively? Are they dissatisfied with whatever they put upon paper lazily and sloppily, and are they at peace with themselves only when they have not stopped short of the very best that they can do? 'Vantage number three!

Once the Elephant's Child understood the skill and the

strength of the instrument that had been developed from his original organ, he used it immediately, constantly, forcefully. No longer could the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake accuse him of not knowing what was good for him. There was no danger of his suffering his prehensile appurtenance to lapse in vigor through want of exercise. To conclude our analogy and our discourse together, it is to be hoped that there is no danger of the student's suffering to lapse through want of exercise whatever he may have gained of power to experience and to communicate. To go through life with senses alert and mind interested, to be able to get from books what the writer intended one to get, to be equipped to write when the call to write comes — it is not too much if one must pay for this with labor and with pain.



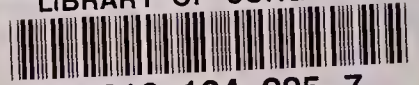




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